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Cape

A HISTORY OF  
GARMENT AND TAILORING WORKERS  
IN CAPE TOWN

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1900 - 1939

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A Thesis Submitted for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the University of Cape Town

by M. Nicol

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A HISTORY OF GARMENT AND TAILORING WORKERS IN CAPE TOWN, 1900-1939

ABSTRACT

The large scale production of clothing started relatively late in South Africa because of the inability of local manufacturers to compete with cheap imports. The industry's tendency to draw the most exploitable workers into a system of "sweated labour" emerged clearly during World War I, when military uniforms were produced in Cape Town under appalling conditions. But the clothing industry did not become firmly established until after 1925 when a protective tariff was imposed on clothing imports. Industrial laws then assisted to ensure that South African clothing production was based on factories not outwork and that the extremes of sweating were prevented from establishing a hold on the trade. From 1925 to 1939 the Cape Town clothing industry grew impressively. The foundations were laid for the rapid expansion of the industry after 1939 and for the emergence of the clothing industry as the leading employer of labour in Cape Town and of the Western Cape as the leading centre of clothing manufacturing in South Africa.

Garment workers in Cape Town have a history starkly different from that of garment workers in the Transvaal. While the latter were strongly organized into a successful, militant union (under the leadership of E.S. Sachs) and were a leading force in economic and political battles in the Transvaal, the former were press-ganged into membership of an employer-sympathetic union created by Robert Stuart of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions. While the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula maintained a strict non-racialism at all times, the Transvaal union excluded African workers and organized coloured workers into a separate branch. While very few Cape garment workers were ever involved in strikes and the Cape Union never once called a strike, the Transvaal garment workers participated in two union-called general strikes and in over one hundred more limited strike actions. Cape garment workers' wages were between ten and forty per cent below those in the Transvaal.

The distinctiveness of the Cape garment workers' history derives from the peculiarities of the class struggle in Cape Town. The slow growth of the city over 250 years; its economic base in commerce rather than in the exploitation of natural resources; the

relative backwardness of Cape Town capitalism - with a dominant merchant class challenging the development of precarious manufacturing enterprises which operated in a highly competitive environment and remained almost entirely confined to consumer goods production; and the absence of primary racial division in the working class, all contributed to a process of class struggle that was more muted than that in the North. Cape Town was infertile ground for the growth of an organized working class movement. Apart from sporadic but intense worker action briefly after World War I, few workers were drawn into either trade union or political organization. On the other hand, Cape manufacturers, despite their differences, were united in the Cape Chamber of Industries (by W.J. Laite) to promote protection for their industries and to build a common front to resist labour initiatives and government interference.

The labour legislation of the 1920's had profound effects on the forms of organization of workers (and employers) in Cape Town and on the class struggle. The legislation provided the basis for a close alliance between the clothing manufacturers and the bureaucratic leadership of the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula. The Wage Act could be applied to unorganized workers in industry and allowed the "Wage Board" to set minimum wages at "civilized" levels. The Industrial Conciliation Act allowed well-organized trade union and employers' organizations themselves to negotiate wages via a Conciliation Board or an Industrial Council. In the Cape clothing industry, employers sponsored the creation of a trade union in the hope that they might avoid the attention of the Wage Board by forming an Industrial Council. This Union, duly registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act, was a major weapon of the employers in defeating two campaigns launched by the Transvaal garment workers' union in Cape Town to organize Cape garment workers and absorb them into a national union to fight for higher wages. The second of these campaigns caused the formation of the current Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Cape) as a defensive move on the part of the Cape manufacturers and the Cape Union against both the Transvaal union and a growing militancy amongst Cape Town workers.

The labour legislation had different effects on the fortunes of tailoring and factory workers. Between 1926 and 1936 the wages and conditions of both branches of the clothing industry in Cape

Town were governed by the Wage Board. Despite the early opposition of clothing factory owners to the Wage Board, their adherence to certain key aspects of the Wage Determinations aided the rapid expansion of the industry and a slow increase in wages. By contrast, the tailoring trades were plunged into confusion by the Wage Board's attempts to abolish home-work. Faced by mounting competition from clothing factories, tailoring declined, becoming a much less important avenue of employment and making a much reduced contribution to local clothing production.

The thesis is a case study in a virtually unexplored area of South African labour history. Its concern is to situate the history of the clothing workers within the class struggle in Cape Town. An analysis of the long-standing wage disparity between the Witwatersrand and Cape Town clothing industries serves to emphasize the interlinkages between the struggles of workers in the two regions. A detailed examination of the operation of the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts in the Cape Town clothing trades shows up weaknesses in the existing "Transvaal-centric" interpretations of this important legislation. The story of organization in the garment industry illustrates many of the problems confronting trade unionism in Cape Town in the inter-war period.

The archives of the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association, the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa and the Secretary for Labour are major sources of the thesis.

To  
Bill Nicol  
and  
Betty Nicol

In magnis et voluisse sat est

Propertius II x 6

[In great undertakings it is enough  
even to have had the will for them]

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Appellate Division (of the Supreme Court)
AFTU	African Federation of Trade Unions (1931-1934)
ANC	African National Congress
APO	African Peoples' Organization
BTI	Board of Trade and Industries
BTU	Cape Peninsula Bespoke Tailoring Union (May 1926); name changed to Western Province Bespoke Tailoring Union (November 1926), to Cape Western Bespoke Tailoring Union (January 1927), and finally, after a fundamental change in the constitution, to Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula (April 1927).
C.A.D.	Cape Archives Depot Central Archives Depot - see S.A.B.
CCI	Cape Chamber of Industries. From 1904 to 1914, the CCI was called the South African Manufacturers' Association and from 1914 to 1922, the Cape Province Manufacturers' Association.
CCMA	Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association - see CWCMA
CDC	Cape Districts' Committee of the South African Trades & Labour Council (1931-1938)
CEC	Central Executive Committee of the Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal)
CFLU	Cape Federation of Labour Unions (1913-1944). Also known as the Cape Province Federation of Labour Unions and the Cape Federation of Trades
CMT	cut, make and trim
CP	Communist Party of South Africa (1921-1950)
CPD	Cape Provincial Division (of the Supreme Court)
CPMA	Cape Province Manufacturers' Association - see CCI
CSC	Cape Supreme Court Cape Western Merchant Tailors' Association - see MTA
CWCMA	Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers' Association. From 1917 to 1925 Cape Town clothing manufacturers belonged to the Clothing Section of the CCI/CPMA. The Association changed its name to Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association in 1942. It has always been affiliated to the CCI.
DIL	Divisional Inspector of Labour
GN	Government Notice (in the <u>Government Gazette</u> )
GWU-CP	Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula - see BTU. In the early 1960's, the GWU-CP changed its name to the GWU-WP.
GWU-WP	Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province - see GWU-CP

ICCI	Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry. The ICCI (Transvaal) was first registered in 1925; the first ICCI (Cape) to be granted registration was registered in 1936.
ICU	The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (founded 1919)
JTA	Journeyman Tailors' Association of the Cape Peninsula (1926-1929). Also known as the Journeyman Tailors' Union of the Cape Peninsula, the Master Tailors' Union and the Master Tailors' Association.
MTA	Cape Western Merchant Tailors' Association (1926-about 1929)
NEC	National Executive Committee of the South African Trades & Labour Council
NPD	Natal Provincial Division (of the Supreme Court)
NUDW	National Union of Distributive Workers
Registrar	The Registrar of Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations
S.A.B.	Sentrale Argief Bewaarplek (Central Archives Depot)
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions (founded 1955)
SAFCI	South African Federated Chambers of Industries (founded 1917)
SAGWU	South African Garment Workers' Union (1930-31 and 1935-38)
SAIF	South African Industrial Federation (1911/14-1922)
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
	South African Trades & Labour Council - see TLC
SATUC	South African Trade Union Congress (1925/6-1930)
SDF	Social Democratic Foundation
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
TCMA	Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association (founded 1925)
TLC	South African Trades and Labour Council (1930-1954)
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa (founded 1954)
TPD	Transvaal Provincial Division (of the Supreme Court)
UDF	Union Defence Force
WTA	Witwatersrand Tailors' Association. Founded in about 1913, registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1925, name changed to the Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal) in 1930.
WPDCTU	Western Province and District Council of Trade Unions (1941-1954)

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My thanks are due, in the first instance, to Mrs A.M. Cunningham of the Department of Historical and Literary Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand and to Mr C.E. McCarthy of the Cape Chamber of Industries. Mrs Cunningham allowed me special access to the archives of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa and of the Trade Union Council of South Africa before they had been fully sorted and indexed. Mr McCarthy arranged for me to have access to the early records of the CCI and the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association. These sources (along with the papers of the Secretary for Labour in the Central Archives Depot, Pretoria) are the principal sources of the thesis.

Next I should like to thank the many libraries in which I have worked while assembling material for this thesis, notably the South African Library in Cape Town, the Church of the Province Record Library at the University of the Witwatersrand and the African Studies Division of the University of Cape Town Library. The staff of all three libraries were extremely efficient and helpful.

David Lunn generously spent many hours in repeated conversations with me recalling his experiences of Cape Town and the garment workers in the 1930's. I am also grateful to him for introducing me to several of his friends and acquaintances from that time whom I was able to interview.

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Baruch Hirson kindly made available to me the transcripts of several interviews he had conducted with South African trade unionists.

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Professor Ian Phimister inspired me to begin this project

and supervised my work during the research stage. Dr Dave Kaplan has supervised the writing of the thesis over the last three years. His constant encouragement, from the dark days of early composition up to the completion of the first draft, motivated me greatly. His comments and criticism have forced me to clarify the direction and purpose of the thesis.

This thesis has now been six years in preparation. During this period I have relied on the friendship of many people who sometimes saw a greater relevance in this undertaking than I did myself. Their support has been invaluable. Susie Giffard's amusement at the narrative style of certain sections which I read to her secured their exclusion from this serious academic work.

Orestes Sfarnas drew the graphs. Pam Britt transformed the handwritten final draft into an authoritative typescript.

Finally, I must record a debt to the village museum in Lillooet, B.C., Canada. All through the research and writing of the thesis I was plagued by the worry that it was too narrowly focused to produce any insights into the broader issues of South African economic history. A visit to the Lillooet Museum, just before tackling the final pitch of the thesis, brought home to me most forcefully that a local history such as this is not only important because it may be productive of wider theoretical or historical insights. It is important because it is local. It can remind people who they really are.

Woodstock

March 1984

## INTRODUCTION

Clothing factories employ more women workers than any other branch of South African industry. Although more than ninety percent of these workers are trade union members, the wages paid by the clothing factories are among the lowest in all of manufacturing industry.

It is no co-incidence that the industrial sector with the lowest wages should also be 'the best organized' - the trade unions play an important role in suppressing and defusing worker discontent. The militant history of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa testifies that this was not always the case in the Transvaal. But, in the Cape and Natal, garment workers have always been dominated by bureaucratic, conservative unions which exist in a more or less happy alliance with the factory owners.

This thesis studies the origins of the Cape Garment Workers' Union by tracing the history of labour and employer organization in the clothing trades from the start of this century up to the outbreak of World War II. The main intention of the work is to explain why this type of employer-dominated unionism was able to take root so early and so firmly in the Cape clothing industry. Analysis of the forgotten history of the clothing workers is not restricted to their trade unions. Account is taken of the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town and of the effects of industrial legislation and employer organization. The thesis breaks new ground as the first detailed account of labour organization in a Cape Town manufacturing industry and also as the first attempt to identify the conditions of economic class struggle<sup>1</sup> specific to Cape Town in the inter-War period.

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1. In this context, 'economic class struggle' refers to all the efforts of workers and working class organizations to secure from the employers or from the state improved wages and working conditions. The concept does not exclude politics but it signifies the struggles which accept the confines of the existing political system and have as their object the wresting of economic concessions from the capitalist class. Poulantzas (1973, p.130) describes the economic class struggle as "the socio-economic relations of the CMP".

# 1     Major Sources

Original use is made of three main archival sources<sup>2</sup>: those of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa (GWUSA), the Secretary for Labour and the Cape Chamber of Industries (CCI). The magnificent collection of GWUSA papers has been well-used since it was donated to the University of the Witwatersrand Library in 1976. However this is the first work<sup>3</sup> to draw on those parts of the collection relating to clothing worker unionism in the Cape. The files of the Secretary for Labour have never, to my knowledge been used, as is done here, to analyse official policy on the implementation of the industrial legislation of the 1920's. The CCI has itself used its records to prepare short official histories of its activities but this is the first time a close study has been made of one of its constituent associations - that of the clothing manufacturers - and it is the first effort to make use of the CCI records for the purposes of reconstructing the labour history of Cape Town.

The CCI archive is not indexed or sorted, and is housed in a state of confusion in several separate store-rooms. While excavating for material on the garment industry, I prepared a rough inventory of the contents of the store-rooms and persuaded the University of Cape Town library to ask the CCI to donate these records to the University for safe-keeping. The library has made several approaches to the Chamber over the past four years but none has been successful.

The CCI archive dates from 1904 and represents the greatest single source of information on the development of manufacturing industry in Cape Town. It is rich in material valuable to economic

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2. I was unable to consult the records of the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (ICCI) (Cape) and those of the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula (GWU-CP - now named the Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province). The secretary of the industrial council and the officials of the Union turned down flat several requests to make use of their records under any circumstances. Mr G. Nel of the ICCI (Cape) stated that the secrecy clause in the council's constitution prevented even its earliest records being made available to anyone. Neither Mr L. Petersen nor Mr C. Petersen of the GWU-WP explained the repeated refusal of their Union to give me any assistance in my research.

3. Apart from my B.A.(Honours) dissertation, (Nicol, 1977).



and social historians and indeed to any social scientist interested in the history of Cape Town. It is distressing that this unique archive remains bundled in cardboard boxes in dusty store-rooms where it is both inconvenient to use and not properly cared for.

## 2 Aims of the Thesis

The aims of the thesis are at once limited and broad. The thesis has a narrow focus on the garment and tailoring workers of Cape Town in a particular period. One of its major aims is to piece together fragments of the untold story of Cape Town's tailors and clothing machinists. But it also seeks to draw out from the experience of the garment workers a broader range of general points relating to Cape Town, to South Africa and to the effects of the uneven development of capitalism.

For example, the study of the records of the clothing manufacturers' and master tailors' associations, in conjunction with those of the Secretary for Labour allows a fascinating case-study of the teething problems of the industrial legislation of the 1920's and its different effects in the clothing industry and the tailoring trade. The legislation had a profound impact on wage levels, work processes and attitudes to labour organization in Cape Town industry. The battles around the trade union organization in the garment industry after 1925, which are recorded here, throw light on many of the central problems of the Cape labour movement. The organization of Cape Town employers by the CCI became one of the main determinants of the path taken by labour organization. The close examination of the activities of the Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers' Association (CWCMA) show this process in detail. Differences in the tenor of class struggle between the Cape Peninsula and the Witwatersrand are stressed and found to be related in part to the backwardness of capitalism in Cape Town. The clothing sector is characteristic of Cape Town industry - it is labour intensive, small scale and challenged by local competition as well as competition from the Transvaal and imports from overseas.

This study thus illuminates a general understanding of Cape Town labour history and some of the regional implications of South African industrial legislation.

The bulk of the thesis consists of a detailed narrative. On the one hand this encompasses the working conditions of garment and tailoring workers, the struggles of workers in factories and sweatshops and the means of their disorganization by the employers, the state and their trade union. On the other hand the narrative highlights the complex relationship between tailors, factory owners and the Wage Board and the conflicts between merchant tailors, journeymen tailors and the clothing factories. Yet despite its concern with everyday events, its efforts to portray the subtleties in the relationships between workers, bosses and trade unionists and its use of sources which directly reflect class struggle, the thesis is not well described as a 'history from below'.<sup>4</sup>

This is for two reasons. First, such a study of the Cape garment workers, to be properly rounded, would include more than is attempted here. In particular, it would include an account of the social background of clothing workers over time and an investigation of the organizational implications of the majority of workers being women. These are not omitted because they are regarded as superfluous to the present study (on the contrary) but because of a lack of readily available sources. Second, 'history from below' is too limiting a description of the purposes of the the thesis as a whole. Unlike many histories from below it explicitly tackles theoretical issues - specifically those relating to the dynamics of regional class struggle. Both of these points merit further explanation.

With regard to the social background of workers, we are able to sketch little more than changes in the racial composition of the workforce. None of the sources consulted<sup>5</sup> could give specific answers to questions about the social origins, family situations, housing conditions or education of the clothing workers. The social milieu of garment workers was constantly changing. The early tailors and tailoresses, the War-time sweatshop workers

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4. See, for example, Thompson (1963); Hobsbawm and Rudé (1973); Stedman Jones (1971); van Onselen (1982).

5. In addition to the major archival sources, sources included newspapers and periodicals, government publications, court records, secondary materials and a limited use of oral testimony.

and the waves of "better class" women whose employment after 1925 secured the success of the clothing industry in Cape Town, all had differing social origins. Speculations about the identity of Cape garment workers in these periods could only be safely made in a wide study of the origins and development of a working class in Cape Town. It should be borne in mind that while about half of the women workers in Cape Town industry in 1938 worked in clothing factories, even then the number of garment workers was small in absolute terms, not being above 6 000. Clothing workers were never a group clearly identifiable apart from the rest of the working class in Cape Town.

With regard to the peculiarities of the clothing industry which derive from its predominantly female labour force, the sources consulted give few clues about the dynamics of the sexual division of labour in the factory. They merely indicate its extent and principal cause - the ability of the manufacturers to pay women lower wages than men.

The interesting studies of Afrikaner women garment workers in the Transvaal by Pollak (1933), J. Lewis (1978), O'Meara (1978), Touyz (1979) and Berger (1982) all rely on the fact that for a long period and for changing reasons these workers were a distinct group within the working class in Johannesburg and Germiston. They were recognized as such by their union and within the factories as well as by politicians. Studies of the Transvaal clothing industry do not deal satisfactorily with the black men who were an important proportion of the workforce from the start of the industry or with the black women who entered the industry during World War II and soon outnumbered white women workers.

A 'history from below' is not prohibited from explicitly discussing theoretical issues<sup>6</sup> but it is not one of its characteristics. An important feature of this thesis is its open discussion of the analytical problems that surround it. It is not possible to understand the story of the garment workers of Cape Town apart from their context in the class struggle in Cape Town. A correct characterisation of the class struggle in Cape Town is thus essential for this thesis - while at the same time being

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6. See, for example, Foster (1974).

impossible. No other authors have considered the regional specificity of class struggle in Cape Town before World War II (or after it) and this study, which does not depart far from its focus on garment workers cannot alone allow a reliable analysis of the broader local conditions of class struggle. The characterisation of class struggle in Cape Town presented in this thesis is therefore subject to revision in later work.

### 3 Analytical Influences

The aims of the thesis which have been noted above are continually given explicit expression. But there remains an additional set of intentions the realization of which depends on the success of the thesis as a whole. To express these intentions and draw out their implications is not easy. They may be expressed starkly and succinctly as follows: In its presentation this thesis attempts to bridge the great divide in recent South African historical writing between Marxist historians who adopt a narrative discourse and other Marxist social scientists who write within a structuralist framework. In particular it seeks to reconcile and synthesize the work of scholars such as Charles van Onselen with that of scholars such as Rob Davies, Dave Kaplan, Dan O'Meara and Mike Morris,<sup>7</sup> who have developed interpretations of South African history while drawing on the theories of Poulantzas.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Referred to below as 'the Poulantzian writers'.

8. The thesis did not set out with the set of intentions mentioned above in mind. It started in a state of confusion and ignorance, about the facts of Cape Town labour history and theories applicable to class struggle in Cape Town, that only lessened in the process of writing and interpreting. No process of historical investigation can (or ought to) begin from a state of analytical clarity. The comments below do not reflect the method of writing and interpreting history. They seek rather to draw out implications of the thesis that could only be seen after its completion. Marx once summarized his dialectical method as follows:

"Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from the method of investigation. The aim of investigation is to appropriate the matter in detail, to analyze its various developmental forms, and to trace the inner connexions between these forms. Not until this preliminary work has been effected, can the movement as it really is be suitably described. If the description prove successful, if the life of the subject

Charles van Onselen's writings are immediately attractive to any writer of South African labour or social history. He writes local history, tracing class conflict in everyday existence and in periods of crisis in order to reveal the interaction of cultural, political and economic conditions. His description is at the same time an explanation for the events, the conditions, the period he is dealing with. Above all, van Onselen is a magnificent storyteller. He brings the past to life. His writings have an intrinsic value besides their importance as the vehicle for new research.

Van Onselen is not simply possessed of a talent for storytelling. His work puts people back into the class struggle. History is not made simply by classes or organizations or fractions of capital. People make history. Their actions may be understood by locating their class position but this rarely provides a sufficient explanation. It is also misleading uncritically to see organizations as the real actors in history (this may be done by identifying an organization with a class or a fraction of capital). People are behind these organizations - often a very few people. To expose their role is not to deny that class interests and positions are expressed through organizations, but to allow that private interests and ambitions can direct an organization as much as elemental class forces.

The success of van Onselen's narrative style<sup>9</sup>, however, draws attention away from the theories of history, of capitalism, of social development, which underlie it. Van Onselen has no theoretical introductions to his work. Nowhere does he articulate the theory behind his writings. This is not a failure in itself - his analysis speaks through his interpretation of the facts and events he interrogates. But it makes him a secretive craftsman. One is able to admire the finished product he provides while not really understanding how it is made.

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matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an a priori construction." (Marx, 1974, p.lix and 1976, p.102).

The qualifying phrase "If the description prove successful" is crucial. The success of an historical narrative depends on many factors. The comments below focus on just one of these factors - the adequacy of the analysis which underlies the narrative.

9. See van Onselen (1976 and 1982).

The Poulantzian writers have a quite different method. It is always open-day in their historical workshop. The specialist concepts of their trade are laid out, like tools, for inspection and questioning. Their finished product comes with plans of its internal layout and it bears the indentations from the clamps and braces used in construction (several of which may still be in place). The Poulantzian writers discuss their theory as much as the concrete conditions to which it is applied.<sup>10</sup> They do not, by and large, adopt a narrative style of expression. They present their work as theory in dialogue with concrete conditions. The Poulantzian writers have introduced new dimensions of explanation into South African history. In particular they have interpreted theoretically the path of capitalist development, the character of racial domination and changes in the class structure in South Africa over an extended period. They have attempted to explain these by reference to the relationship of South Africa to the world capitalist system as well as to the internal dynamics of the South African social formation. The Poulantzian writers identify broad themes in South African history which other historians can investigate. It is important that these themes emerge from an explicit and open interaction between theory and inquiry.

The usefulness of the Poulantzian writers in furthering debate is beyond question. This thesis attests to their value in stimulating and directing historical research. It does this while fully realizing the disadvantages and weaknesses of aspects of the work of Poulantzas and his South African followers.

Firstly, the most obvious disadvantage of the Poulantzian writers is that their theoretical focus often makes their work difficult to read and understand. Those inspired by Poulantzas have, too often, absorbed not only his theory but his style and idiom too. One can imagine an Adam Bede of the next century confiding to George Eliot:

van Onselen was like a good meal o' victual, you were the better for him without thinking on it. But Poulantzas was like a dose of physic, he gripped you and worreted

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10. See Davies (1977); Davies, Kaplan, Morris and O'Meara (1977); Kaplan (1977); Morris (1979).

you, and after all he left you much the same.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, and most seriously for this thesis, the Poulantzian framework, as it exists, cannot deal with locality. Its concern is with the social formation in toto not with regions within the social formation in which class struggle takes particular forms which flow from particular local conditions. This is a theoretical 'gap' which the thesis does not attempt to fill but has had to come to terms with.

Thirdly, as with any theory there is a danger of theoreticism. In the work of the Poulantzian writers there are not always adequate checks on theoreticism. Theory can take on a life of its own. Theoretical debate is necessary but finally concepts must be judged by their usefulness and consistency in historical explanation. Too often a theory is tested in an ad hoc manner. Isolated facts are cited, research is undertaken only to confirm the answers already determined by theory. If one instance doesn't yield suitable confirmation another can be sought out or 'overdetermination' is invoked.

This thesis has two aspects to its presentation:

- 1) The adoption of a narrative form of history writing which is informed by a particular analysis of South African history, capitalism and class struggle in Cape Town.
- 2) An explicit formulation of crucial aspects of the theory that informs the narrative.

The second aspect makes clear that a simple augmentation of the theory underlying van Onselen's work with the insights of the Poulantzian writers is not proposed. The analytical constructs need to be debated openly and theoretically. Their usefulness is determined solely by how they 'perform' in the narrative. The ultimate test of an historical theory or analysis is its ability to sustain and strengthen an historical narrative.

### 3a The Usefulness and Limitations of the work of the Poulantzian writers

This section of the introduction summarizes the applicability

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11. See Adam Bede (London: Chatto & Windus), 1952, p.175.

and usefulness of the work of the Poulantzian writers in this thesis and discusses the limitations of their work in developing an analysis of class struggle in Cape Town.

The Cape clothing industry was put on its feet by the policies of the Pact government after 1924. After struggling for twenty years against severe foreign competition, the protective tariffs introduced by the Pact and renewed by subsequent governments, allowed the local manufacture of clothing to be profitable. The clothing industry was one of the first successful areas of import substitution. The Pact government's concern that industrial protection should produce jobs for white workers at 'civilized' wages greatly affected the clothing industry. It was the first industry to be investigated by the Wage Board and Wage Board Determinations set minimum wages in the Cape clothing industry from 1926 to 1936. All the unions which exist in the clothing industry today have their origins in this decade. The Transvaal garment workers' union was a party, in 1925, to the first industrial council agreement ever to be gazetted. By 1936 industrial councils were operating in Cape Town and Durban as well.

These issues of industrial protection, civilized labour and industrial legislation, both before and during the rule of the Pact and Fusion governments, are important themes in the work of Davies and Kaplan. Their analyses of the state and the development of manufacturing industry before World War II provide a crucial part of the interpretive background of this thesis. Their concerns<sup>12</sup> with theorising the forms of class struggle in South Africa pose a problem central to this thesis - the identification and explanation of the forms taken by the class struggle in Cape Town. Their view of the capitalist state as the disorganizer of the dominated classes and the organizer of the dominating classes (which is derived from Poulantzas, 1973) is reflected in the analysis of the alliance described here between the Cape clothing manufacturers, the union officials and the Department of Labour.

The work of the Poulantzian writers, by focusing on the state, follows the principal trends in class formation. It produces

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12. And that of Morris and O'Meara.



a periodization of the state<sup>13</sup> which reflects the dominant currents in capitalist development and class conflict for the whole social formation. This periodization, punctuated by mine strikes and gun battles, monopoly capital, migrant labour and racially exclusive institutions cannot have an immediate relevance for Cape Town, that quiet backwater with sweetheart unions, competitive capital and racial integration. Yet the Poulantzian theoretical framework provides no guidelines for theorising such 'local' conditions of class struggle. The periodization of the state does not require detailed consideration of every single incident of class conflict. It is drawn to consider only those incidents which have a direct effect on the state - the nexus of class struggle. The particular forms and development of the class struggle in Cape Town is not an issue for the Poulantzian writers. However, it is clearly a central issue for the historian of Cape Town.

### 3b Analysing the Conditions of Class Struggle in Cape Town 1900-1939

'Conditions of class struggle' is a phrase that occurs throughout the thesis. As a concept, 'conditions of class struggle' comes specifically from the work of Davies. It refers to the full range of conditions - economic, political and ideological - under which the class struggle is waged. The concept is given focus by the periodization of the state. The conditions of class struggle vary between different time periods rather than between different geographical regions. The concept serves its limited purpose within the work of the Poulantzian writers but it cannot be used in the same sense when writing local history where the regional characteristics of class struggle are of paramount interest. The temptation is to develop a concept of 'local conditions of class

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13. The dominant classes in a social formation dominated by the capitalist mode of production are combined in a 'power bloc'. Changes in the composition of the power bloc and changes in the power relations between the constituents of the power bloc indicate changes in the 'form of state'. The capitalist state goes through different phases or stages characterised by the prevalence of a particular form of state. The specification of these phases is what is meant by a 'periodization of the state'. (See Kaplan, 1977, pp.iii-iv; Poulantzas, 1973).

struggle' that would allow account to be taken of regional as well as temporal variations in conditions of class struggle. No such effort is made in this thesis. Neither is there any speculation on whether such a theory is more likely to be a down-scaled version of Poulantzas than a sub-atomic physics of local struggle that breaks with Poulantzas as decisively as Einstein did with Newton.

In this study, the phrase 'conditions of class struggle' is not a concept when used in the context of local struggles. It is a 'collective noun' which refers to the full range of economic, ideological and political factors that secure a particular outcome to struggles in a factory, in an industry or in a city. The phrase can thus encompass the regional distinctiveness of class struggle as well as changes over time.

Conditions of class struggle in Cape Town differ markedly from those in the rest of the country. 1) The nature of capitalism in Cape Town is different. Commercial capital dominated manufacturing capital up until the 1920's and thereafter capital remained competitive and small in scale. Before World War II the influence of monopoly capital, all pervasive on the Witwatersrand, was not directly experienced in Cape Town. 2) Class struggle in Cape Town never manifests itself primarily as a conflict between races. The skill divisions in the workforce did not coincide with racial divisions as they largely did elsewhere in South Africa (van Duin, 1983). The isolation effects generated by state policy in Cape Town were different from those operating in the rest of South Africa.<sup>14</sup> 3) The labour movement in Cape Town never developed, as it did on the Witwatersrand, into an organized threat to the dominant classes in Cape Town.

The guiding principle behind our assessment of the class struggle in Cape Town is the uneven development of capitalism.

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14. See Kaplan (1977, pp.18-28). Isolation effects conceal from the dominated classes the nature of their oppression. They are promoted through ideological and juridical institutions. Kaplan argues that the basis for the isolation of Africans, for example, is found in their partial, non-complete separation from the land.

This affects our subject at three levels - international, national and industrial-technological.

The uneven development of capitalism on a world scale established the Cape as a colony subordinated to Britain. This subordination was economic, political and ideological. One of its effects was to hamper the growth of manufacturing industry and to secure the dominance of merchant capital in Cape Town. Without protective tariffs most South African manufacturing concerns were doomed to a precarious existence. The need for tariff protection caused a few Cape manufacturers to create the South African Manufacturers' Association in 1904. This later developed into the Cape Chamber of Industries and the national South African Federated Chamber of Industries. Although the actions of these bodies had only a marginal effect on the institution of protective tariffs in 1925<sup>15</sup>, they ensured a purposeful unity amongst the leading Cape Town industrialists by this date. The organization of the CCI, built slowly but steadily over a 20 year period, gave a crucial advantage to local manufacturers when they needed to unite in the mid-1920's to adapt to the changes introduced by the Pact government, particularly those changes which related to labour organization and minimum wage determination. The subordination of the Cape to Britain had a weakening effect on the capacity for unity and organization of the working class in Cape Town. The backwardness of peripheral capitalism, its small scale and intensely competitive nature, put structural limits on the ability of the working class to conduct successful economic struggles. In 1925, unions were weak and craft-bound. The majority of workers were unorganized. This relative strength of the employers and relative weakness of the workers had significant effects on the class struggle in Cape Town.

Capitalism developed unevenly within Southern Africa as well as on a world scale. The capitalist penetration of the sub-continent before the discovery of minerals took place under the auspices of merchant capital. Cape Town was the military, administrative and commercial centre. It was remote from the cutting edge of settler and mercantile expansion and followed its own path of

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15. See Chapter 2, below.

development. Wars of conquest and dispossession had been fought out by the early eighteenth century. Slavery met labour needs until, following the emancipation of slaves in 1838, it gave way to forms of wage labour and the growth of a stratum of independent craftsmen, tailors, fishermen, etc.

The Cape colony was jerked out of its bucolic stupor by the discovery, first of diamonds and then of gold. Many writers have stressed the severity of the rupturing effects on economy and society in the interior produced by the new assault on the people and land of Southern Africa. Forms of monopoly capital soon came to dominate the mining industry. With its imperial links, mining capital had the will and ability to force on Southern Africa transformations in politics, economics and ideology which allowed for the profitable mining of gold and diamonds.

Cape Town grew again as a seat of government, a port of entry for immigrants and a commercial centre. Yet it was again hundreds of miles away from the new foci of capitalist interest. It was not directly affected by the social tensions that accompanied the forging of a migrant labour system and the development of capitalist agriculture. Disposessed farm labourers swelled the ranks of the city poor and an expanding population put pressure on housing but the city was a witness to and not a participant in the great conflicts that were changing the character of Southern Africa. No new economic resources were developed near Cape Town. Commercial capital still held sway in political and economic life. The South African War, which opened the way for a new phase of capitalist penetration of the interior, left Cape Town largely unscathed. The history of Cape Town and the Western Cape is thus cast in a different mould from the rest of Southern Africa.

Cape Town's subordination to the interior, secured economically by the mineral discoveries, was formally acknowledged politically in the formation of the Union in 1910.<sup>16</sup> This did not have

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16. Just as Poulantzian theory cannot deal with locality it is confused by the sudden expansion or contraction of a social formation (or the merging of social formations). Before 1910, the Cape colony had its own state, its own contradictions, its own trajectory of capitalist development. After 1910, Cape politics became the property of a new social formation and was submerged beneath a flood of contradictions and struggles, the intensity of which it could not match.

an immediate effect on the economy. Laws applicable in each of the four colonies before Union remained in force until specifically repealed. The Cape was able to continue its old path of slow economic growth based on commerce and struggling industry for 15 years. It retained its qualified non-racial franchise. The most significant legislation - the Native Labour Regulation Act and the Native Land Act - did not touch Cape Town. But the industrial laws and policies of the Pact government after 1924 affected Cape Town profoundly.

The Pact came to power on account of class struggles in the interior and its political programme grew out of class struggles in the interior. Not surprisingly the industrial legislation had a different effect on the class struggle in Cape Town from that on the Witwatersrand. The legislation was framed to blend in with and resolve class conflicts on the Witwatersrand which had been sharpened to a special intensity by racial domination, the prevalence of monopoly (mining) capital and the strength of the white labour movement. In Cape Town manufacturing capital developed in the context of powerful commercial capital and low-key class and race conflict. The industrial legislation allowed trade unions and employers' organizations to be formed but their rôle in Cape Town was artificial - they were the outgrowth of developments elsewhere. Both owed their existence, in the first place, to the legislation - not to any quickening of class struggle. The legislation (as the thesis argues at length) had an unusually important effect on the class struggle in Cape Town.

No one gave special consideration to how the policy of industrial protection, the Industrial Conciliation Act or the Wage Act would affect Cape Town. Its subordination to the interests of stability on the Witwatersrand is illustrated by this fact alone. The dominance of the Witwatersrand was experienced practically by Cape clothing manufacturers when the Wage Board sought, in 1926, to force them to raise their wages to the levels paid in the Transvaal. That low wages in the 'peripheral' Cape Town clothing industry should have threatened the competitive ability of clothing manufacturers in the 'central' Transvaal, is a further consequence of the uneven development of capitalism at a national level. This wage disparity endured. It was the cause of the

two campaigns by the Transvaal garment workers' union to organize Cape clothing workers. These are key events in this history.

The third level at which the uneven development of capitalism has a bearing on our study is that of the clothing industry itself. Clothing was one of the last major branches of industry to move from the home or small workshop into the factory. The invention and widespread use of the sewing machine came only in the latter half of the nineteenth century and even this crucial technological advance did not make factory production necessary or more profitable. By reason of the backwardness and discrete nature of the technology applied to the production of clothing, the clothing trades retained a level of competition between rival manufacturers and a small scale of enterprise characteristic of the early phases of capitalism. At the same time they were not characterised by the real divisions of skill which marked early capitalist manufacture. The production of clothing has, from the earliest times, been characterised by an extreme division of labour. This has severely limited the proportion of highly skilled workers. These factors; small enterprises, the extreme division of labour, low capital intensity, the low barriers of entry for new firms, fierce competition between firms and between unskilled workers; make for low wages and a difficulty of sustaining union and employer organization. Reasons have already been suggested for the organization of Cape clothing manufacturers before 1925. But in this context it is not the lack of organization among workers before 1925 that is remarkable but the presence and persistence after 1925 of a greater degree of formal worker organization than in any other sector of South African and Cape Town industry. Here again the Industrial Conciliation Act, which provided the framework for clothing worker organization, would appear to be a deciding factor.

The uneven development of capitalism underlies the backwardness of Cape Town industry, the weakness of worker organization and the strength of employer organization up to 1925. These three elements contribute towards the special effects of the industrial legislation in Cape Town which are identified as a major determinant of local conditions of class struggle in the period 1925 to 1939.

This preliminary analysis of the class struggle in Cape Town

is set out fully in Chapter 2. It informs the subsequent narrative chapters.

### 3c Why study local history?

Local history, presented as it is in this thesis, can have both a theoretical and a political importance.

History is constantly invoked in present day efforts to organize people into trade unions, youth and community organizations and political bodies which oppose Apartheid and capitalism. In general, the use made of history is unimaginative and uninformed. Resistance to racial oppression and exploitation in the past merely justifies and inspires present resistance. The historical incidents cited are most often drawn from the great themes of South African history: colonization, conquest and dispossession, repression and exploitation. In the face of a real need to assert the common history of all South Africans against the divisive policies of the South African government, regional history is often ignored. Yet the class struggle is conducted subject to regional conditions and the legacy of local struggles has a direct bearing on its course of development.

A comparison between the garment workers' unions in Johannesburg and Cape Town between 1925 and 1939 shows how different are the workers' experiences of trade unions, of industrial councils, of employers, of state attitudes. The experience of the South African working class is not a single experience. Conditions of class struggle differ between cities, between industries, between factories. When one examines the history of a group of workers, conditions of class struggle are local conditions. Local history is where mistakes are seen and understood as they occur. Local history is where trade unionists and political activists can learn lessons. Local history shows people that resistance is not only in great events, nationally remembered. Resistance is found in the "nooks and crannies"<sup>17</sup> of their own past. The history of class struggle is their history. The writing of regional history can meet a political need.

Local historical research has a role in contributing to the

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17. See van Onselen (1976, p.239).

analysis of South African history in general and to the theorization of specific aspects of that history. It can be a proving ground for hypotheses developed from studies of other regions (in South Africa or elsewhere) or developed from a newly noted theory. In the context of the work of the Poulantzian writers, regional studies reveal the concrete conditions underlying their periodization of the state. Such studies may question the validity of the periodization. This thesis is not led to dispute the periodization of the state. It tends to support much of the analysis of Davies<sup>18</sup> and Kaplan of the effects of industrial protection and the industrial legislation while stressing that the regional impact of these policies was different.

This section of the Introduction has argued that the thesis, in its presentation, may be viewed as a synthesis of the insights of van Onselen and the Poulantzian writers into the historical process. It does not assert that the two approaches to social analysis are reducible to each other, it stresses the differences between them. However their difference is not that of mindless empiricism on the one hand and theoreticism on the other. It is rather that of the north and south poles of a magnetic field which together secure the functioning of an electric motor.

#### 4 Cape Town Labour History

The wave of new interest in South African labour history noted by Eddie Webster (1978) six years ago has yet to rise high in Cape Town. There remain few published works about the history of workers in the city and none have the study of labour history or Cape Town as an object. Only the work of Peter Wickins, which is largely on the ICU, has appeared in the decade since the Durban strikes aroused academic interest in labour studies.

Both of the two major secondary sources – Roux (1964) and Simons and Simons (1969) – describe events in Cape Town in an anecdotal fashion as part of a wider history of South Africa.

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18. Chapter 4 disputes aspects of Davies' analysis of the importance of the Wage Act in promoting mechanization in industry and the employment of 'civilized' labour.



The only published work to summarize the history of trade union federations in Cape Town<sup>19</sup> is Muriel Horrell's useful book Trade Unions in South Africa (1961). Robert Stuart is the only Cape trade unionist to have written memoirs.<sup>20</sup> These were never published in book form but were serialized in a labour journal (Stuart, 1950, 1951). The official history of the National Union of Distributive Workers by Norman Herd (1974) records organization in Cape Town after our period as does Luckhart and Wall's official history of SACTU (1980). Most recent writings on labour in Cape Town (for example in the S.A. Labour Bulletin) have concentrated on events since 1973.

The reasons for this lack of concern with the labour history of Cape Town are easy to find. It is a history that lacks the drama of the story of the gold and diamond mines, of migrant labour and large scale industry. No events in Cape Town had much effect on national labour struggles or state policy. With the exception of the Food and Canning Workers' Union (which drew members mainly from the country towns) none of the unions existing in Cape Town today had a militant past likely to attract notice. Finally, the lack of primary sources available in Cape Town itself may have discouraged local historians from investigating the history of labour. The papers of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions are part of the TUCSA archives at the University of the Witwatersrand where the records of the Cape Town branch of the NUDW are also housed. The files of the Secretary for Labour are an essential source, but these are held in the Central Archives in Pretoria. The only union records available to researchers are those of the FCWU which were transferred to the University of Cape Town library in 1983.

In beginning to reconstruct the history of labour in Cape Town there are two groups of workers who immediately call for

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19. A more detailed account is given in the unpublished seminar paper of Kelvin Williams (1974).

20. Wilfrid Harrison's Memories of a Socialist in South Africa is occasionally useful.

attention - the workers on the docks and those in the clothing factories. The docks were the largest single employer of labour in Cape Town up until 1914. Many Africans worked as stevedores and dockworkers were the first African contract workers to arrive in Cape Town.<sup>21</sup> The dockworkers have a history of labour organization dating at least from the early years of this century. They were the first members of the ICU. Later they were members of one of the few African unions to be registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act and to participate in an industrial council. Again today the dockworkers, though greatly reduced in number, are among the best organized workers in Cape Town.

Interest in the history of workers in the clothing industry derives from the size of the industry in terms of employment and output and its importance as the leading sector of manufacturing industry in Cape Town. In 1983, over 60 000 worked in the clothing factories.<sup>22</sup> The Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province is the largest regionally based union in South Africa and is one of the wealthiest unions in the country. It is today regularly characterised as a bureaucratic, employer-sympathetic union.<sup>23</sup> This thesis shows that such criticisms are not new and, at least up to 1939, were justified.

As the field on which the action of the thesis is played out is so little known, space is devoted to a summary of the origins of labour and employer organization and to outlining hypotheses about the forms assumed by class struggle in Cape Town.

The thesis firstly suggests that the dominance exercised over the Cape Town labour movement after 1925 by the Cape Federation (CFLU) and its secretary Robert Stuart, was founded on a broad-based alliance with the bosses which was mediated through the CCI.

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21. Labour History Group (1984). Debbie Budlender has done a preliminary study of the history of dockworkers but has found few satisfactory written sources.
  22. 'ICCI (Cape): Annual Report 1982', late 1983, p.4. In 1981, one quarter of all workers in Cape Town manufacturing industry were garment workers (Business Argus 7 March 1981).
  23. Maree (1976); Bloch (1982); Grassroots May-June 1980, July-August 1982; Cape Herald 10 November 1983; Unity November 1983 (the newsletter of a recently formed "Clothing Workers' Union" which seeks to challenge the leadership of the GWU-WP).

Secondly, it is argued that the industrial legislation of the 1920's operated in a different way in Cape Town from the Transvaal. The significance of this legislation in moulding struggles in Cape Town cannot be explained by reliance on the Transvaal-centric analyses by Davies (1976, 1979) and Lever (1977). The legislation was the condition for the establishment of a union movement in Cape Town rather than a blow struck at its militant growth. In the rest of South Africa the Industrial Conciliation Act, by excluding African workers, ensured the separation of most struggles of skilled and unskilled workers. It is held up as a primary cause of the working class remaining divided on racial lines. Neither argument is applicable to Cape Town. The vast majority of unskilled workers were 'coloured' and had the same legal opportunities to organize as skilled workers. Even African workers in Cape Town could legally belong to registered unions until 1937.

An analysis of the history of the Cape garment workers illustrates and lends support to both of these hypotheses. Stuart's domination over the GWU-CP was based in a long-standing alliance with the Cape Clothing Manufacturers Association. A comparison between the histories of the Cape and Transvaal garment workers' unions highlights the different effects of the industrial legislation in the two regions.

The most controversial aspect of this thesis is its endorsement of most of the criticisms levelled at the Cape Federation of Labour Unions and its leader Bob Stuart by labour leaders based in the Transvaal. Stuart was the 'father' of trade unionism in Cape Town. From 1913 to his death in 1950, he was the dominant figure in Cape unionism. He firmly resisted all attempts to unite the South African labour movement in a single national co-ordinating body. He did his utmost to discourage Transvaal unionists from building a Cape base for such a body among unorganized workers in Cape Town. Stuart was an unrelenting foe of 'politics' in trade unions and a consistent opponent of communists. His Cape chauvinism and opportunist criticism of the racism within many Transvaal unions<sup>24</sup> gave him the attention of Cape workers,

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24. See Williams (1974).

but his Transvaal (and local) opponents always accused him of being a bosses' man who sold out the workers. He was accused of creating stumbling blocks to unity between the union movements of the North and South in order to retain his leadership of an independent Cape labour movement. This thesis argues that Stuart and the CFLU, while not necessarily the stooges of the CCI, were often its willing dupes and that, especially after 1925, Stuart and the group he built around him, retained their dominance over the Cape labour movement largely on account of the alliance they entered into with the bosses. This alliance has its best example in the Cape Garment Workers' Union.

While the records of the CCI, the GWUSA and the Secretary for Labour tend to confirm an unfavourable judgement of Stuart and the CFLU, every effort is made to interpret Stuart's actions and those of his faction of the CFLU in the light of the class struggle in Cape Town. These actions were never simply the outgrowth of Stuart's personality and the personalities of certain corrupt individuals. They have a rationality which none of the CFLU's critics could properly see - even if they could never have appreciated it.

This thesis makes two main contributions to the study of labour history in South Africa. Firstly, it is the first major study of the history of the labour movement in Cape Town. It shows that the experience of workers in Cape Town diverges sharply from that of workers in the mines and factories of the Witwatersrand, the region which has, in the past, attracted most academic attention.

Secondly, the thesis shows that industrial laws have different effects in different regions and these are determined by regional conditions of class struggle. Most generalizations about the effects of the Industrial Conciliation Act, being based on observations in the Transvaal, need regional qualification. Similarly, the effects of these laws do not remain constant through time. The importance and function of a particular law in regulating class struggle changes in sympathy with the conditions of class struggle. Even if the provisions of a law are not amended (and that is not the case with South African industrial legislation) it is implemented and acts in different periods in different ways.

The industrial law is not static but dynamic; its different aspects are not revealed simultaneously but historically. It is absurd that industrial sociologists at universities should rely only on accounts of the intentions of 1924 legislators and the early effects of the Industrial Conciliation Act when introducing students to the Labour Relations Act today. This is an abuse of history which at the same time obscures the real use which can be made of history in understanding the current operation of industrial legislation.

In this context, this history of the garment workers, their unions and their employers throws new light on the operation of South Africa's labour relations system. It is the first case study of class struggle conducted within the structures of the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts. Recent writers on South African labour history implicitly dismiss registered unions as unworthy of study as trade unions because they were incorporated into state apparatuses and further tamed with economic concessions. But although the labour movement of white workers never again presented a political challenge to the state itself as it did in 1922; although all white worker struggles were contained within legal structures; registered unions still had to fight the economic class struggle. To say their economic struggles were contained is not to confirm their successes for workers. We need to trace historically exactly how the industrial legislation affected worker struggles. At a time when the government has opened up the old labour relations system to participation by African and non-racial unions, it is interesting to trace how the garment workers of Cape Town had their economic struggles channelled and drained by similar legislation over a fifteen year period.

The structure of the thesis is straightforward:

Chapter One provides a background to the early growth of the clothing industry in South Africa and outlines the working conditions in Cape Town tailoring shops and factories between 1900 and 1925.

Chapter Two sketches the growth of Cape Town manufacturing industry from 1900 to 1939 and outlines the structures of labour

and employer organization over the same period. This pivotal chapter sets out hypotheses about the nature of the economic class struggle in Cape Town and the specific effects which the industrial legislation had on local organization. The remainder of the thesis seeks to justify these hypotheses by detailed reference to the clothing industry.

Chapters Three and Four look closely at the effects of the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts on wage levels and employer and worker organization in the Cape tailoring and clothing industries. The period covered is 1925 to 1934.

Chapters Five and Six record and analyse the failure of two efforts by the Transvaal garment workers' union to capture control of the Cape Union in 1930-1 and 1935-8.

Chapter Seven first assesses the effects of the "Cape Campaigns" and sketches the history of the GWU-CP since 1939. Secondly it concludes the thesis by summarising how the history of the garment and tailoring workers of Cape Town supports the hypotheses about the economic class struggle in Cape Town set out in Chapter 2.

Appendix A assesses the wage disparity between the garment industries of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town. The lower wages paid in Cape Town were a real or imagined threat to Transvaal wage standards for thirty years and were the cause of much bitter conflict in the industry.

## CHAPTER I

SEWING MACHINES AND SWEATSHOPS

The development of the industrial production of clothing has been subjected to little close scrutiny by economic historians. This is surprising in view of the very large numbers of people employed in the clothing industry and the early importance of the industry in many advanced economies. In Britain, for example, there were more than 500 000 clothing workers in 1925 (Dobbs, 1928, p.205). In 1929, the American clothing industry employed more than one million workers (Hardy, 1936, pp.9; 150).

In one sense, however, the lack of interest in the history of the industry is understandable. Mechanization and factory production of ready-made clothing came relatively late, less than one hundred and fifty years ago (Thomas, 1955, p.1), and the principal technological innovation upon which the industry was based, the sewing machine, was of a relatively low level of sophistication and in essence has remained unimproved upon until very recently. While the advent of the sewing machines led to a drastic reduction in the cost of new clothes, it did not have the same disruptive effects on the established tailoring trade as innovations in spinning and weaving, for example, had in the textile industry. Sewing machines were cheap, portable and simple to operate. The economic forces tending to shift clothing production out of homes and small workshops and to concentrate it in large factories were infinitely weaker than in those industries whose new technology required large capital investment and in which economies of scale substantially reduced costs. The first clothing factories were part of a new industry supplying cheap ready-made clothing to people who previously wore second-hand clothes or clothes made at home. The early factories did not threaten the livelihood of tailors. Indeed, tailors were able to reduce prices and produce a better quality garment by using sewing machines. The sewing machine easily fitted into the minute division of tasks long established in the trade.

The lack of analysis of the clothing industry as a whole is mitigated by the enormous amount of public attention which

has been focussed on the industry because of its long use of sweated labour. Since the emergence of the gild system the needle trades have been most noted for low wages, intense exploitation of labour and bad, often appalling, working conditions. Cut-throat competition and the highly seasonal nature of the trades compelled tailors and factory owners to force wages down to their lowest level and to make extensive use of outworkers. Small, ruthless operators with their sweatshops and slopshops, and exploiting hidden armies of miserable home-workers, could compete successfully with large, modern factories.

The evils of sweating in the British clothing industry first attracted public notice in the middle of the last century when Charles Kingsley wrote a pamphlet entitled 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty'. This pamphlet and his novel 'Alton Locke' were both inspired by a series of articles in the London Morning Chronicle which exposed the iniquities of "the sweating system". However it was more than fifty years before any effective action was taken. In that period, the widespread introduction of the sewing machine led to an enormous increase in the number of outworkers and a further deterioration in working conditions (Schmiechen, 1975). From time to time public concern was revived - most notably by the 1888-90 Select Committee on the Sweating System and by the researches of Charles Booth, Beatrice Potter (Webb) and others (Booth, 1902; 1903). In 1906 an enquiry by the Board of Trade and the famous 'Sweating Exhibition' organized by the London Daily News led to the launching of an anti-sweating campaign. This culminated in the 1909 Trade Boards Act, the enforcement of which removed some of the worst aspects of sweating in Britain (Tawney, 1915).

The massive clothing industry in the United States of America fed on successive waves of cheap immigrant labour. It appears that the battle against the sweating system in America between 1910 and the mid-1930's relied to a much greater extent on trade union organization than was the case in Britain (Hardy, 1936; Zaretz, 1934).

Although legislation and trade union organization have led to greater control over the excesses of exploitation prevalent in any system of production which relies on outwork, outwork still



exists in all industrialized countries and particularly still in the clothing industry. Where clothing production has been largely moved into factories, clothing workers remain amongst the lowest paid industrial workers.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter deals with the development of clothing production in Cape Town between 1900 and 1925. There is little detailed or comprehensive information available on the origins of this small and struggling sector of Cape Town industry. However it is clear firstly, that clothing production in South Africa showed many of the characteristic features of clothing production in the industrialized countries, and secondly that clothing production in Cape Town shared common features and problems with other local manufacturing industries. Chapter one illustrates the first point while Chapter two deals generally with the second point and also with the growth of worker organization in Cape Town. Together, Chapters one and two lay the basis for interpreting the path of development followed by the clothing industry and clothing worker organization in Cape Town.

### 1 The Political Economy of the Clothing Industry

Before describing the actual conditions in the Cape Town clothing trades in the first quarter of this century, it is necessary to make some general points about the clothing industry as it came to exist in industrial societies. Four types of clothing manufacturing establishment can be identified (see Figure 1.1):

1) The traditional, centuries old professional producer of clothes was the tailor with his helpers. As factory production grew and ready-made clothing improved in quality, tailors increasingly produced mainly 'higher class' clothing. The retail bespoke tailor made garments to fit an individual customer. He might work alone, employ assistants in his own workshop or sub-contract the work out to a middleman or directly to home-workers.

2) The wholesale bespoke factory produced garments measured to fit an individual customer but by factory methods. Uniforms for post-office or railway employees were produced in such a fac-

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1. In 1975 clothing workers received the lowest industrial wages in all the E.E.C. countries and Switzerland (The Economist 11 March 1978).

Figure 1.1: Divisions in the Clothing Trade

RETAIL BESPOKE TAILORING	Customer deals directly with the tailor, who measures him for the garment.	Tailor buys the cloth chosen by the customer.	Garment may be fitted on customer several times during production.	Unit production	Product made to customer's instructions. Price agreed beforehand.
WHOLESALE BESPOKE FACTORIES	Factory receives order with measurements and makes pattern.	Customer chooses cloth from factory stocks or a sample book.	After completion, garment may be fitted by a draper and possibly altered in factory.	Unit production	Product made to standardized order. Price set.
WHOLESALE READY-MAKE FACTORIES	Factory designs pattern and chooses the range of sizes	Factory chooses cloth.	No fitting.	Mass production	Seeks buyer (retailer) after production. Price negotiable, <u>OR</u> may make to order and set the price.
CUT, MAKE AND TRIM FACTORIES	Factory is given pattern by the retailer (or a wholesale factory)	Cloth supplied by the retailer.	No fitting	Mass production	Makes to retailer's (or wholesaler's) instructions. Price agreed beforehand

tory. This type of establishment also made up 'special orders' where a customer's measurements were sent to the factory by the customer himself or through a retailer. This was not as expensive as retail bespoke tailoring but the finished garment fitted better than one ready-made.

3) The wholesale ready-made factory mass produced garments from standard patterns in different sizes which it sold to retailers or wholesale merchants. To begin with, only the cheapest clothes were made by this method. As the science of pattern-design progressed, a larger proportion of people were able to find a ready-made garment that fitted them properly. Better quality clothing gradually began to be produced by the methods of mass production.

4) Cut, Make and Trim (CMT) factories were supplied with cloth and patterns by a retailer, wholesaler or a ready-make factory. They were instructed to cut the cloth and make it up according to the pattern and to attach all the trimmings. The price for the job was agreed in advance. Such a factory used mass-

production methods. Its overhead costs were lower than those of a ready-make factory as it did not invest in stocks of cloth.

Depending on conditions of labour supply, all of these types of establishment might make more or less use of outworkers. The bulk of ready-made clothing produced in London in the 1890's was not produced in factories but in the homes of outworkers (Schmiechen, 1975, pp.9; 35; 264).

A concern was not restricted to any one of these 'divisions' in the clothing industry. A factory might usually make uniforms for individual bank clerks but turn to producing ready-makes in slack periods, or even accept a CMT contract from a retailer. A tailor with his own workshop might accept outwork from a factory or execute small CMT contracts.

The four divisions of the clothing industry described above have many common features: they all use the same technology and, to some extent, have similar labour processes; they all draw on the same potential labour force. All are seasonal and are characterized by an extreme division of labour and intense competition.

All branches of garment manufacture have the sewing machine as their key instrument of labour. The process of joining together two or more pieces of material by machinery is the one really efficient technique in the making of clothes. To all intents and purposes it completely ousted hand-sewing and opened the way for the mass production of new clothes for all classes of people. Compared with the importance of the sewing machine, the other tools of the clothing trade were insignificant (Thomas, 1955, p.37-8). There were other labour-saving innovations in common use<sup>2</sup> but none were indispensable in the same way as the sewing machine.

A similar labour process could exist in a small clothing workshop of twenty workers and in a large factory with three thou-

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2. For example, the bandknife, succeeded by the Eastman Electric Cloth Cutting Machine; Reece buttonholing machines (c.1914); blind-stitching machines (after 1900), button-sewing machines; cloth-laying machines (Hardy, 1936, p.199; Thomas, 1955, p.38). Most recently microprocessors have been used to control sewing machines and computers are programmed to aid layout and pattern design (Garment Worker 3/10 October 1980).

sand. The small factory would have one production line and the larger proportionately more. Important differences in the labour process were of course evident between a factory and the smallest workshop. Conveyor belts and synchro-flow systems incorporate workers in a qualitatively different way from a workshop operating on the 'make-through' system where one machinist makes a complete garment. But a worker trained in one division of the industry could be employed in any other. Many former employees of tailors made their way into factories.

The clothing industry is unusually seasonal. There are peaks of demand for workers in autumn and in spring. Fashion branches are particularly prone to seasonal fluctuations but most factories experience seasonal layoffs and short-time, 'balanced' by overtime and speeding-up in the busy periods. The factor of seasonality is a contributory cause of the continued existence of outworkers and small sub-contractors. In the slack periods they are the first to suffer as factories become able to complete all production themselves, but in booms their numbers expand rapidly. The seasonal peak provides many sub-contractors with the greater part of their annual income.

The manufacture of clothing was split into many separate tasks long before the invention of the sewing machine. (The sewing machine did, however, encourage a further subdivision of procedures). In a tailors' shop for instance, the master tailor was a skilled craftsman, knowing every aspect of the making of a garment from measuring/cutting to finishing and fitting. He presided over a hierarchy of operatives, the lowest of whom might know how to complete only one operation in the making of one garment, such as lining a coat sleeve or sewing a button-hole. Depending on the size and class of his business, a master might do part of the work himself or have several employees or he might sub-contract the work out. The lower level employees and outworkers were often women but the most skilled tasks were the preserve of men.

The structure of the tailoring shop was duplicated in the factory, only the scale of operation was larger and the division of tasks more minute. Men again had their defined places as cutters and senior operatives and also as pressers, a job requiring strength and endurance. The sewing work was divided out between

specialized machinists after passing through the hands of fitters-up and baisters, and before going on to fellers, trimmers, button-holders, cleaners, pressers and packers.

The size of clothing manufacturing concerns varied greatly. In general retail bespoke tailors were small but might employ fifty or more workers in a workshop (as Garlicks did in 1906) and draw on the labour of many more outworkers. Some tailors had no workshop at all but worked at home and sent work out. Factory size had no lower limit. The smallest factories could successfully compete with the largest, employing hundreds of workers.

Competition in the clothing trades was intense between tailors and factories, between factories/tailors themselves and between workers. In the early days tailors were not subject to competition from factories as factory production was confined to the cheap clothes market. However, as the quality of ready-makes improved and wholesale bespoke tailoring developed, the division of the market became blurred and all tailors, except those catering for the very wealthy or making speciality garments, found themselves increasingly hard-pressed. The making of shirts and underwear were the first sectors to be absorbed by factory production in both Britain and the United States. The market for suits was shared between retail bespoke tailors and the wholesale bespoke factories for a period, but by the late 1930's both were losing ground to ready-made suits. The effect of this trend towards ready-make production was most severe for the handicraft tailors, many of whom were driven out of business. Wholesale bespoke factories were easily able to shift to making ready-makes only - often, in any event, a large part of their output.

The basic reason for the high degree of competition between clothing firms (that is, between all the tailors and factories producing for the same market) is to be found in the ease with which new firms could establish themselves. The ease of entry was itself due to the low level of technology<sup>3</sup> used in clothing manufacture and the wide range of markets for clothing (for different sexes, ages, income groups, uses). As a result of the stiff

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3. The instruments of labour were cheap and compact and required a low level of skill to operate.

competition in the industry master tailors, sub-contractors and factory owners were under extreme pressure to reduce costs. The labour intensive nature of garment manufacture and the fixed price of raw materials meant that the workers bore the brunt of the necessity to keep costs down.

In the period with which this work concerns itself wages in factories were kept low by the employment of the most exploitable strata of society as workers. At one time these might be recent immigrants, at another young women or blacks. These groups of workers were prepared to accept pay just at or below the costs of the reproduction of their labour power. Costs were still further reduced by sweating, which is seen most characteristically in the systems of sub-contracting and outwork but includes the practices of speeding-up and lengthening hours.<sup>4</sup>

The sub-contracting system was to an extent the legacy of the tailoring firm. Most tailors did not operate workshops but gave their work out to journeymen tailors (middlemen tailors) who had a workshop with assistants, did the work themselves at home, perhaps with family help, or even contracted it out again. Payment to the journeyman was on a piecework basis and contracts were awarded to the lowest bidder. The unpaid wives and children of journeymen and their employees were often drawn into the work to complete contracts. But, as the historians of clothing industry trade unionism in Britain have noted, the sweating system "waited on the development of the (sewing) machine before it was revealed in its total ugliness" (Stewart and Hunter, 1964, p.47).

The sewing machine was cheap, compact and relatively light. It could be installed in any room or garret. The machine did not require an operator to possess the same degree of skill as for hand-sewing. To outfit a 'shop', hire a few workers and begin production was a simple task. A clothing contractor's success depended on the savagery with which he could exploit his workers.

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4. Clementina Black defined sweating as "the effort of an un-economic system to extract from the misery of the unorganized, ill-equipped worker the equivalent of organized, well-paid, well-equipped industry. It was the competition of flesh and blood with machinery" (Black, 1907, p.xi).

Sweating was intensified in homes as well, where outworkers operated their own machines at still lower rates.<sup>5</sup> Many elderly or semi-invalid women were willing to undertake such work at rates which did not yield a living wage. Married women with small children also took outwork as there was very little else that was compatible with staying at home and looking after their families. Even large clothing manufacturers gave out work because piece-wages were low and they incurred no additional overhead costs. Another effect of the existence of sub-contracting and outwork was to drag the wages of 'free', able-bodied workers down to the lowest levels. For reasons we shall discuss, outwork and sweating never appeared in South Africa in as chronic a form as they were manifested in Britain and the United States. But they were features at several stages in the growth of the South African clothing industry, and the economic forces of which they are the most extreme expression governed the South African clothing industry as they did all others.

## 2 The Supply of Clothing in South Africa up to 1925

The South African clothing industry followed the path of development marked out by many Cape Town industries. A period of very limited local manufacture and a great reliance on imports was followed by a spurt of growth during the First World War. This was halted by the depression of the early 1920's and renewed competition from cheaper imports. It was only after the state imposed protective tariffs in 1925 that the clothing industry was able to establish itself as the main supplier of domestic demand.

In the years before 1925, clothing imports made up a significant proportion of total imports into South Africa. From 1897 to 1906 between ten and nineteen per cent of total imports into British South Africa were of clothing.<sup>6</sup> From 1911 to 1925 imports of clothing accounted for between twelve and seventeen per cent of total imports into the Union.<sup>7</sup>

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5. Many workers hired their sewing machines. Singers, the sewing machine manufacturers, were the inventors of the hire-purchase system (Thomas, 1953, p.37).

6. Calculated from figures in G37.1898 and G26.1907.

7. See Table 1.1, below.

The source of the great bulk of these imports was the United Kingdom. In 1913, South Africa imported £5 million worth of clothing, £3.25 million of which came from Britain. This constituted thirty eight percent of Britain's total clothing exports.<sup>8</sup> South Africa was the principal foreign market of the British industry.<sup>9</sup>

During the South African War the demand for clothing from South Africa contracted causing some unemployment amongst British workers (Thomas, 1955, p.43). However several firms recouped their losses by producing military uniforms. A trade journal of 1902 stated:

Orders and money are being sent over from the Cape almost as freely as if there had never been any war... Here in Leeds we possess the honour of having clothed the fighting men of both sides. We have made a very large number of active service uniforms for Mr. Tommy Atkins, and a very large number of our slim brethren the Boers wear ready-mades that were produced in Leeds factories.<sup>10</sup>

Clothing factories came to South Africa only at the beginning of this century. The first factory began operation in Salt River in 1907.<sup>11</sup> The scattered nature of the South African market should not in itself have discouraged the development of a clothing industry before this date but other factors did. The main hindrance was the very low cost of imported clothing of all but the best quality. The local manufacturer could not easily compete with goods produced by workers who were exploited as intensely as those in Britain.<sup>12</sup> There was no chance of protective

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8. Tawney (1915, p.2).

9. In 1913 South Africa was followed by Australia (11%) and New Zealand (8%) (Tawney, 1915, p.2).

10. Men's Wear 22 February 1902, p.177, quoted in Thomas (1955, p.43).

11. A. Fraser & Co. (The Buyer February 1957).

12. Except for a brief period during the first World War, Cape clothing manufacturers consistently claimed that the wages of clothing workers in Britain were substantially below those paid in South Africa. (See, for example, S.A. Commerce and Manufacturers' Record, 8 January 1914, p.13 and Select Committee on the Regulation of Wages Bill: Minutes of Evidence S.C. 4 - 1917, pp.53, 56, 58-9). This claim was again forcefully



tariff barriers being erected to encourage local industry as the Cape Parliament, and Cape business life in general, were dominated by merchant capital which drew its strength from the import trade.

Dominant in this trade were the large wholesalers such as J.W. Jagger & Co., Cleghorn & Harris, Garlicks and Hepworths, several of which also owned retail outlets. Garlicks had its own tailors' workshop as well. Some of the wholesalers were actual branches of a British firm, some were tied to one British firm for which they acted as agents, while others were independent importers. The wholesalers dealt in ready-made clothes of all qualities - coats, shirts, suits, underclothing and childrens' garments. In addition, they would measure customers for suits and then send the measurements to Britain to be made up in the 'special order' department of a factory.<sup>13</sup> This produced a well-fitting suit which was cheaper than the tailor-made product. A substantial part of the wholesalers' trade in imported special orders was with drapery stores in towns throughout South Africa. The drapers sent the measurements of their customers through the wholesalers in Cape Town and then fitted the suit on its arrival. Inland stores were also supplied with stock ready-makes and soft goods.<sup>14</sup> The owners of the wholesale houses were opposed to the success of factories which would absorb part of their market. They strenuously opposed high tariffs being placed on manufactured goods.

The first clothing factories in South Africa were set up to produce special orders and measured uniforms for bank and post office workers and the railways. It was common for these factories also to produce ready-made clothing when they were not busy with special orders. This differed from the development of the clothing industry in Britain. There, the first factories produced the

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made before the 1935 Customs Tariff Commission (see, for example, Minutes of Evidence paragraphs 260, 288, 3170 and the Return of A. Fraser & Co.) and before the Wage Board ('Memorandum of Objections to Wage Board's Recommendation, [Gazetted December 30th 1927], Cape Town, January 1928'- CCI Archives).

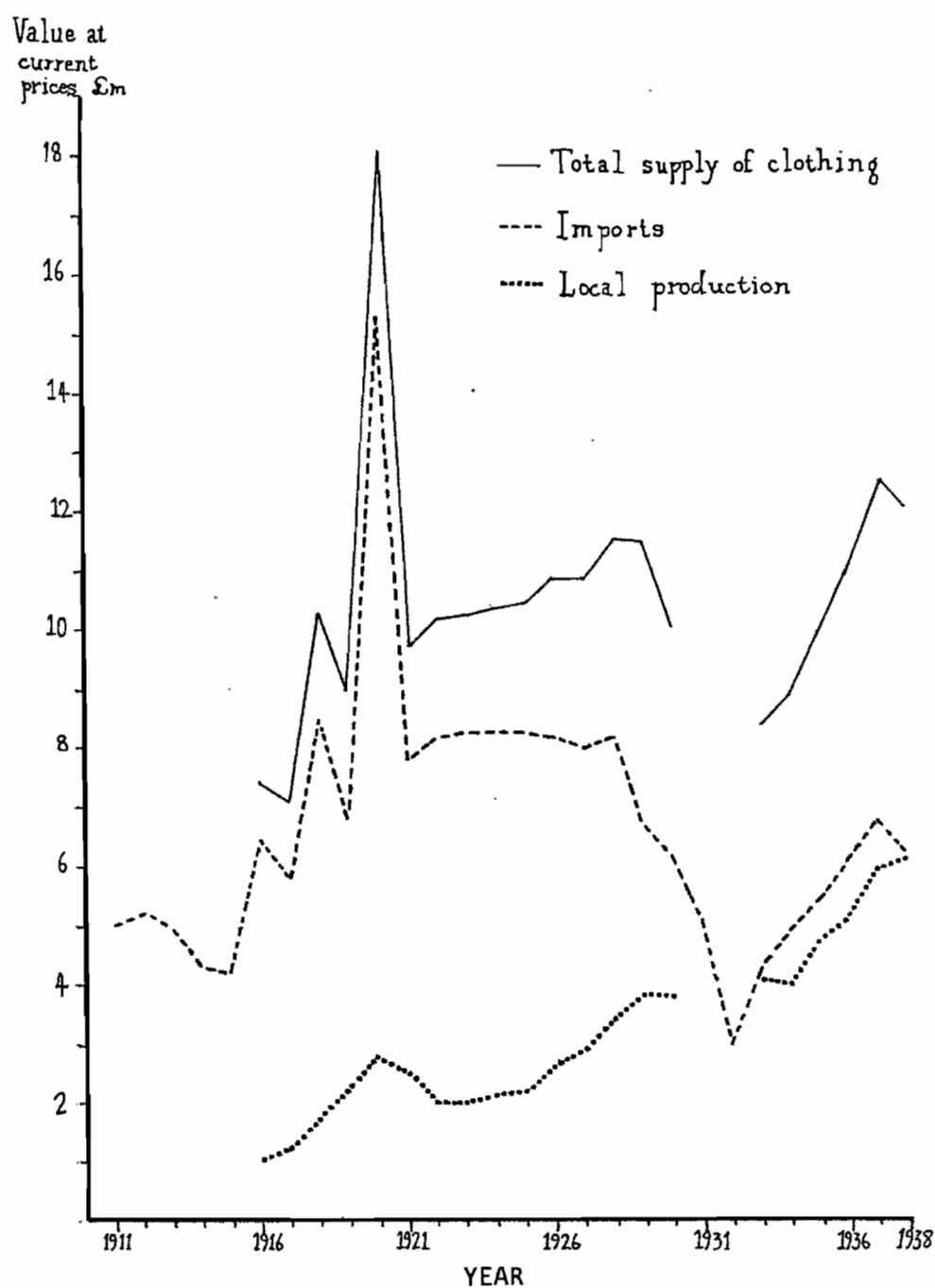
13. S.A. Commerce and Manufacturers' Record 3 July 1909, p.198.
14. Select Committee on the Regulation of Wages Bill: Minutes of Evidence; pp.21; 29; 86. (Hereafter S.C. 4 - 1917 Minutes).

cheapest ready-makes and for fifty years there was a clear distinction between the retail bespoke tailor, producing quality tailored garments, and the wholesale ready-make factory (Thomas, 1955, p.3). As the quality of ready-made clothing improved, in the early twentieth century, some ready-make factories began to take orders for clothes to be made to measure. This division of the trade, first called 'special orders', became known as 'wholesale bespoke tailoring', meaning clothes which were made to order by factory methods.

So, by the early twentieth century, factory-produced clothing was posing a double threat to the existence of tailors. Ready-makes were improving in quality and becoming acceptable to people higher up the social scale who would normally buy from a tailor. Secondly factories were making clothes to measure. This was as true for tailors in South Africa as it was for those in Britain. Factories first produced clothing for men - suits, coats, trousers, pyjamas and shirts as well as underwear. This was followed by some clothing for children. Women's dresses were slower to enter factory production - in Cape Town this branch of the industry became important only after 1939, although 'ladies underwear' was fairly well established by then.

The sources of supply of new clothing to the South African market up to the Second World War are indicated in Table 1.1 and Graph 1.1 below. At the turn of this century, most of the new clothing consumed in South Africa was imported. There were numerous local tailors and dressmakers, but their contribution to the total supply of clothing was minimal. The first clothing factories appeared just before the First World War. The disruption in trade between Britain and South Africa boosted the expansion of existing factories and the sudden, urgent demand for military uniforms led to the formation of additional clothing factories. The boom ended abruptly in 1920 and the clothing industry remained in a depressed state until the Pact government's measures to encourage local industry took effect after 1925.

The extreme fluctuations in the statistics in 1920 are the result of the crisis in the British (and world) economy in 1920-21. The renewal of intense foreign competition between 1920 and 1925 had a drastic effect on the South African clothing industry.

Graph 1.1: The Supply of New Clothing in South Africa 1916-1938

Source: Table 1.1, below

Table 1.1: The Supply of New Clothing in South Africa 1916-1938  
(current prices)

YEAR	Local output of clothing (£000's)	Imports of clothing (£000's)	Exports (£000s)	Total new clothing supply (£000's)	Local output as % of total supply	Clothing imports as % of total imports	Clothing & Textile imports as % of total imports
1911	-	5 055	0	-	-	14	28
1912	-	5 201	0	-	-	13	28
1913	-	4 995	0	-	-	12	25
1914	-	4 315	0	-	-	12	25
1915	-	4 214	2	-	-	13	29
1916	1 003	6 451	6	7 448	13,5	16	33
1917	1 272	5 875	13	7 134	17,8	15	33
1918	1 736	8 593	11	10 318	16,8	17	47
1919	2 220	6 864	17	9 067	25,5	14	31
1920	2 800	15 325	23	18 102	15,5	15	30
1921	2 497	7 824	6	9 775	25,5	13	25
1922	2 078	8 207	1	10 284	20,2	16	34
1923	2 009	8 297	1	10 305	19,5	14	30
1924	2 093	8 323	0	10 416	20,1	13	27
1925	2 240	8 294	0	10 534	21,3	12	29
1926	2 667	8 290	1	10 956	24,3	11	26
1927	2 933	8 027	1	10 959	26,8	11	24
1928	3 425	8 204	3	11 626	29,5	10	25
1929	3 800	7 780	2	11 579	32,8	9	24
1930	3 877	6 228	2	10 104	38,4	10	25
1931	-	5 184	-	-	-	10	26
1932	-	3 019	-	-	-	9	24
1933	4 121	4 356	0	8 477	48,6	9	25
1934	4 007	4 920	1	8 926	44,9	7	20
1935	4 701	5 476	191	9 986	54,0	7	18
1936	5 153	6 099	194	11 058	46,6	7	18
1937	6 057	6 804	256	12 605	46,9	7	17
1938	(6 173)	(6 242)	(297)	(12 118)	50,9	7	19

Notes: The figures for clothing imports were obtained by adding together the following categories: Apparel & Slops; Cotton, Linen, Silk and Wool Manufactures; Uniforms and Appointments and Hats & Caps.

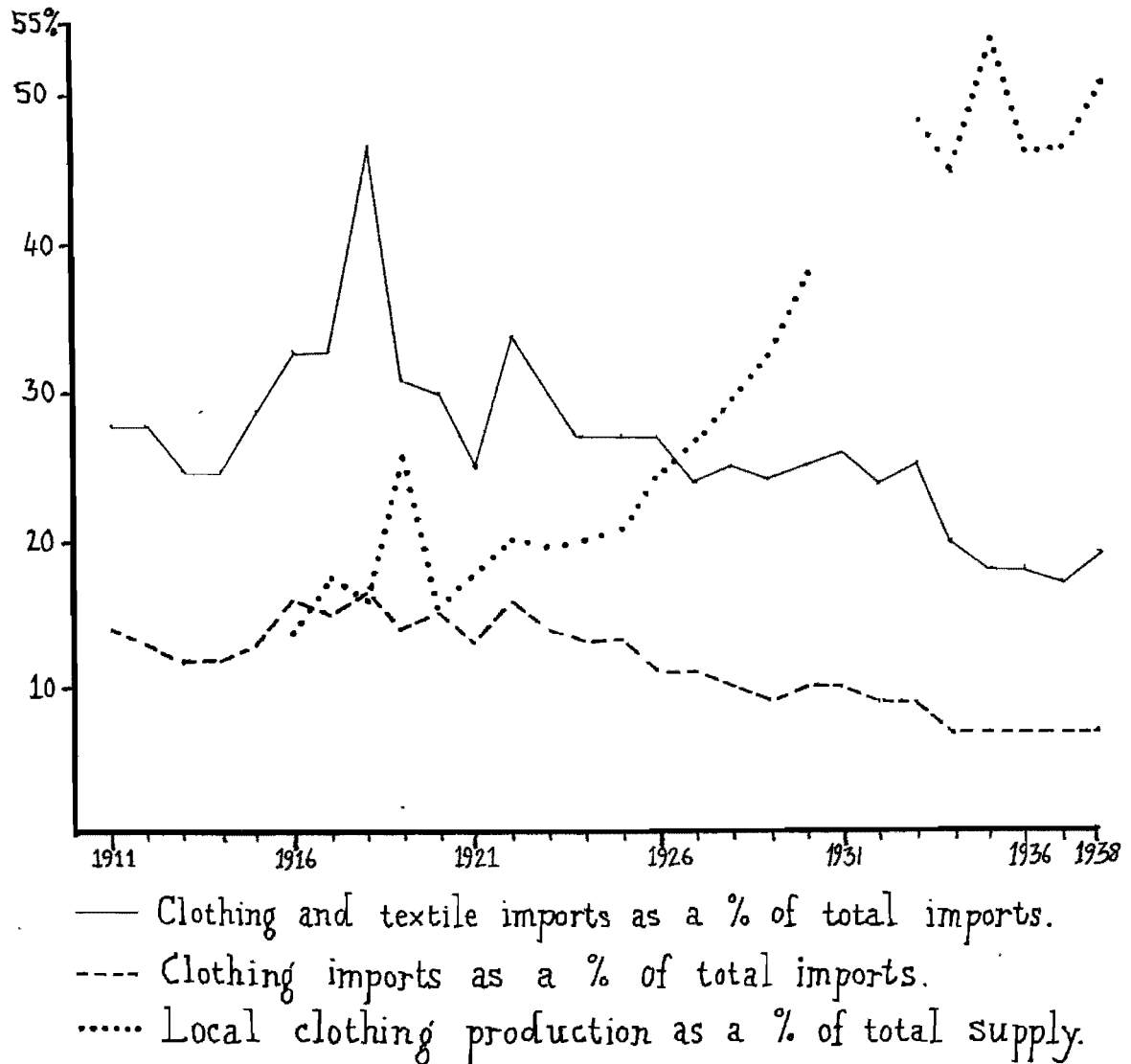
The method of statistical collection changed in 1938, so the 1938 figures are not comparable with earlier figures.

Sources: Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa  
Official Year Books of the Union of South Africa

Local clothing production declined both in relative and absolute terms. At the end of the First World War, local clothing factories produced about 25 per cent of South Africa's clothing requirements. Through the 1920's this fell to about 20 per cent, although the local market expanded steadily.

The South African clothing industry suffered a relatively minor set-back during the Great Depression and from 1932 onwards supplied about 50 per cent of all the new clothing consumed

Graph 1.2: Local Clothing Production as a Percentage of the Total Supply of Clothing 1916-1938



in the country. Clothing became one of the first major areas of import substituting industrialization in the South African economy. Its progress up to 1938 is illustrated in Graph 1.2 above. The percentage of total imports made up by imported clothing declined from 14 per cent in 1914 to 7 per cent by 1938.

The two main centres of clothing production were Cape Town and the Witwatersrand. At the end of the First World War there were about 2 500 workers in all branches of the clothing industry in Cape Town compared with 1 200 on the Witwatersrand.<sup>15</sup> The conditions inland were, it appears, more favourable to growth than in the Cape during the early 1920's because by 1925 there were slightly more clothing workers inland than at the coast.<sup>16</sup> By 1939, almost 17 000 workers were employed in clothing factories. 8 000 worked in the Transvaal, 6 000 in Cape Town and 3 000 in the Eastern Province and Natal. Durban, today the second major area of clothing employment after Cape Town, became an important centre for the industry only after the Second World War.

### 3 Conditions in the Cape Town Clothing Trades before 1925

From 1900 to 1925 the progress of the clothing industry in Cape Town was hesitant and precarious. In this period the industry broke out of the confines of bespoke tailoring and workshops and included ready-make production in factories. However, the latter was extremely vulnerable to foreign competition until it was granted sustained protection from imports after 1925. There are no adequate statistics with which one might chart the outlines of the development of the clothing industry in Cape Town and I have discovered no sources which allow a continuous assessment of other aspects of the industry's growth. However, a clear indication of the changes in the industry in Cape Town may be gained from an examination of conditions in two years, 1906 and 1917.

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15. UG 51-1918, Statistics of Production 1916/17.

16. The 1924/25 Industrial Census showed 3 079 clothing workers in the Western Cape and 3 175 in the Southern Transvaal (UG 41-1927). Between 1919/20 and 1924/5 the value of tailoring and garment production in the Western Cape fell from £0,705m to £0,422m while in the Southern Transvaal it fell from £0,728m to £0,682m.

In both years select committees (appointed by the Cape Legislative Assembly in 1906 and by the Union Parliament in 1917) heard evidence on conditions in the clothing trades in Cape Town. 1906 is the year before the first clothing factory was established in Cape Town. 1917 is the date of the first strike of clothing factory workers in Cape Town. Although the conditions in 1906 and in 1917 obviously represent two different phases in the development of the clothing industry in Cape Town, it is not possible, given the lack of information, to date the beginning of this transition from tailoring to factory production more precisely than the years of the First World War, or to identify its dynamics, beyond pointing to wartime conditions.

### 3a Conditions in 1906

Some insight into conditions in the tailoring trade in the early years of the century may be gained from evidence presented before two select committees of the Cape Parliament in 1906.<sup>17</sup> The select committees investigated conditions in the industries of Cape Town to judge whether it was desirable that a Factory Act be introduced into the colony. Evidence was submitted for all the small and struggling industries of Cape Town. But both committees were shocked by the conditions they found to exist in tailoring. The trade followed its common pattern of sub-contracting outwork, piecework, long hours and low wages.<sup>18</sup>

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17. The Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Conducting of Factories and the Fair Wage Clause and the Select Committee of the House of Assembly on the Factory Act. The report of the former was published as C1-1906 and of the latter as A6-1906.

18. Much of the following account is drawn directly from the minutes of the oral evidence presented before the two select committees. Neither committee issued a comprehensive report which resolves contradictions between the evidence of different witnesses. Both favoured the introduction of a Factory Act. While tailoring was given more time than other industries and 'representation' from all levels in the hierarchy of the trade appeared, there was only one Muslim or coloured witness (who was very briefly examined) and no inspection was made of the Muslim shops about which the most serious allegations were made. (See J. Garlick MLA in 1906 Cape Hansard, p.594).

Abraham Stone, a journeyman tailor, stated:

As far as my own trade is concerned, I find that the sweating here in this colony is appalling...The shop-keepers take their orders and give the work out to a sub-contractor, who again employs men to do piece-work, which is done in domestic workshops, in most cases a room where the people eat and sleep. The hours of work are practically unlimited. I know of cases where 100 hours a week are put in, but generally it is 70 or 80 hours as a rule. There is piece-work in most cases and that accounts for it... There is no proper sanitation either...Clothes are made frequently in domestic workshops, where the people eat and sleep in the same room, and the clothing made there is sent out to the public. Then there is the question of the girls, who work perhaps 50 hours a week: there are very few women. I know cases where they work as much as 70 and 75 hours a week, and how can you expect these girls to become good wives and mothers?<sup>19</sup>

Other witnesses confirmed that, with the exception of Garlicks, which had a number of workshops, the bulk of tailoring was done by outworkers and by sub-contract. Wages varied from £3 to £5 per week for cutters and more highly skilled men, from £2.10 to £2.15 for men workers and from 12 shillings to £1 for women. "Unusually long hours were worked, very frequently until midnight and at times all through the night".<sup>20</sup> One committee member put the following to a journeyman:

I judge from your evidence that these people are bound to work these long hours and receive this small remuneration because you yourself get from the leading firms so small a remuneration from the work you take from them; is that the position?

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19. A6-1906, Evidence, pp.140-141.

20. C1-1906, Report, p.ix.



The reply was that it was exactly the position.<sup>21</sup> The one committee stated in its report:

...it appears that it is not from avarice or greed that these long hours are worked, but these unfortunate people are compelled to do this owing to the conditions under which the clothing trade is carried on.<sup>22</sup>

Great concern was voiced about the dangers to public health which existed in clothes being made in small, dirty rooms and even serving as bedding before being returned to the master tailor. It was feared that the recent epidemics of smallpox and plague might have gained a more rapid hold on Cape Town as a result of the existing tailoring system.<sup>23</sup> An inspection was made of rooms in which white tailors and their helpers worked in District 6. The state of the rooms was declared to be "anything but satisfactory".<sup>24</sup>

Neither select committee made any attempt to investigate the conditions under which Cape Town's community of Malay tailors worked. The Muslim tailors had been established for many generations and some of them became relatively prosperous. An informant said that of the Muslim artisans, tailors were amongst the wealthiest and most important citizens. As they worked from home they were ideal Imams, being always easily available for advice.<sup>25</sup> Muslim tailors made traditional Malay garments as well as taking work from white master-tailors on contract. Several white tailors gave evidence in 1906 about the situation of the Muslim tailors. They described their conditions as more terrible than their own.

There are about 200 Malay tailors, and they live goodness knows how many families in a house. The Malay tailor has not a separate room as a workshop. He has a room, and there is a bed, his wife and children, and goodness knows how many other people in that room, and

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21. A6-1906, Evidence, paragraph 1226.

22. C1-1906, Report, p.x.

23. Ibid., p.xi.

24. Report of Sub-committee appointed to visit Certain Workshops in the City. Appendix B to C1-1906.

25. Interview with Mr Achmat Davids, the son of a tailor, 1978.

there he does the work...The majority of trousers are made by Malays and there I think it more dangerous than in the case of a coat. The majority of trousers and vests are made by Malays in this town, and they are made in horrible places.<sup>26</sup>

At the time, Garlicks was the only tailoring firm to have a workshop attached to its premises. About ninety workers were employed there. They were both coloured (Malay) and white and the majority were pieceworkers. John Garlick MLA, the owner, explained:

Two or three years ago, there was a fair amount of that sub-contracting, but I came to the conclusion not to allow it for the reason that we had sufficient room in our own shop and decided that rather than somebody else should take the cream off the wages from the work-people, we would do it in our shop, and pay them better.<sup>27</sup>

An average pieceworker received about £2.15 a week - a figure several other witnesses estimated as the average wage of most male workers. (It is not clear whether this wage could only be earned by a worker if he had family help). Garlicks 'factory' opened at 7.30 a.m. and closed at 6 p.m. Day workers came at 8 a.m. and pieceworkers before 10 a.m. The system did not however exclude work at home. Most workers took "big bundles of work to do at home",<sup>28</sup> the reason for their later arrival at the workshop. As Garlick said:

Many of the pieceworkers find the (workshop) hours too short and are anxious to work longer...If (a man) has a wife and family and is anxious to earn as much as possible, he will take work home and do an hour or two's work in the evening, or before he comes to the workshop in the morning.<sup>29</sup>

The organization of the workers in the tailoring trade presents special difficulties. Competition for work is intense, specially

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26. A6-1906, Evidence, p.113.

27. C1-1906, Evidence, p.79a.

28. A6-1906, Evidence, p.113.

29. C1-1906, Evidence, p.78a.

between outworkers; workshops are small and often enmeshed in family structures and the sub-contracting system makes the middle-man journeyman tailors both employers and workers at the same time. In Cape Town these difficulties of organization were compounded by divisions which existed between the Malay tailors and the other white (mainly Jewish) tailors. Between 1900 and 1925 a succession of short-lived tailors trade unions made brief appearances. In 1906, Abraham Stone, a journeyman, was secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors.<sup>30</sup> The society was campaigning for a fifty hour week and minimum wages of £4.4 for men and £2 for women.<sup>31</sup> However, Abraham Walker, another journeyman, stated:

The (tailors') organization cannot do any good because they are not organized properly. We have about 150 or 170 members, all Europeans, belonging to the organization, but there are Malay tailors in Cape Town, and these Malays are the cause of all the trouble. They have insanitary workshops, and they are working for any price; they are not particular what they get...We have been trying to get the Malays to join, but we cannot get the Malays to come and organize. We have sent money and had meeting after meeting trying to get them together, but they will not organize because the shops they work for say "You must not listen to what they tell you", and the Malay workman looks to the shopman who employs him as a god; whatever the shopman says to him is law, and whatever he pays the Malay takes. The shops can do with the Malays what they like and the Malays will not organize. The only thing they explain to the Malays is that we want them to pay so much a week, and that we want to rob them of their money. That is what they explain to the Malays

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30. The Amalgamated Society of Tailors was formed in the latter half of 1905 (S.A. News 28 October 1905). The S.A. News commented that "the competition between the Malays and the Jews is well known to be the great stumbling block to complete success in their organization". It referred to the "ruinous distrust which unfortunately prevails". (S.A. News 2 December 1905).

31. Stone said that Hepworths Ltd. had agreed to their scale of prices "on account of the appointment of the Factory Act Select Committee". (A6-1906, Evidence, p.144).

and the Malays will not organize.<sup>32</sup>

No evidence was presented to either select committee which indicated that women workers were organized in any way. The majority of workers in the tailoring trade were men and men occupied all the key positions in the trade. So long as the journeymen were organized they could conduct a strike as it was they who distributed work to outworkers.

### 3b Conditions in 1917 and the Tailors' Strike

The clothing trades again came under the scrutiny of a parliamentary select committee in 1917.<sup>33</sup> By then the rudiments of a modern clothing industry had developed. Several clothing factories had been established and a great volume of military clothing was being produced. Factories had been built before the war to produce for the special order business.<sup>34</sup> The war created a special opportunity for South African manufacturers. Trade with Britain was disrupted, reducing the competition from imports and in these abnormal conditions it was possible for a larger range of clothing to be profitably produced in South Africa. There was an immediate, heavy demand for military uniforms from the government out of which the established factories first made "huge profits".<sup>35</sup> The favourable climate enticed many new 'entrepreneurs' into setting

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32. A6-1906, Evidence, p.124.

In April 1901, all of the two-hundred or so white tailors in Cape Town conducted a twenty-day strike demanding higher rates from the master tailors. The master tailors conceded increases of only one seventh of the demands and the strike ended. Malay tailors continued to work throughout the strike, ignoring the appeals of the Cape Town branch of the United South African Tailors Union for unity (South African News; 3, 4, 5, 6 and 24 April 1901).

33. The Select Committee on the Regulation of Wages (Specified Trades) Bill. The committee's report and minutes of evidence were published as S.C. 4 - 1917.

34. A. Fraser & Co. was followed by The African Clothing Co. and M. Bertish & Co.

35. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, pp.55; 77.

up shop and soon their competition established a new and deeper polarization between the 'upper' and 'lower' classes of trade. The worst conditions of exploitation came to exist in the production of military clothing under contract from the government. The Union Defence Force had been disturbed by the high prices it first had to pay for uniforms. Its solution was to buy up large quantities of material and give it out on a cut, make and trim basis. An industrialist complained:

Their policy was to get the work done at the cheapest price possible. The policy of squeezing was carried out to an enormous extent. It was made impossible for respectable firms to compete, because of those conditions that were established. The squeezing was performed in the ordinary way of bartering. A man would come round and say, "Can you make 1 000 tunics for us?" The reply would be "Yes". He would then say "What price?" When he was told the price he would say "Well, I can get it done at less than that" and so it came about that it was impossible for any of the established firms to compete at all...<sup>36</sup>

The men who got these contracts immediately gathered the cheapest possible labour they could get round about them and established work rooms. The whole thing was merely a question of getting the lowest price possible, and it involved very long hours...The agents of the military were continually going round seeing that these things were made to time, and the conditions were particularly bad. Of course, that got organized by and by into what I can call by no other name than sweating.<sup>37</sup>

A tailor commented:

The man who can send in the lowest tender is considered the man to do the work, and the burden of the low price falls on the shoulders of the work-people who have to make the garments.<sup>38</sup>

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36. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. W. Marshall MPC (Hepworths), p.32.

37. Ibid., p.30.

38. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Julius Folk, p.80.

The labour registration officer for the peninsula said:

When the large contracts for military clothing were called for, these contracts appear to have been sublet in some cases to other persons. I am informed that military overcoats given out at a price approximating 15s. for making, to the first firm that secured the contract, were eventually found to have been made for approximately 5s. as a result of subletting.<sup>39</sup>

He continued:

This sweated tailoring trade is carried on by the Jewish people to some extent, and coloured people also. The Jewish people manage the business. I know of a case of a man who was not a tailor at all, but he obtained a contract and sublet it, and now he has started tailoring on his own account. This sort of thing is usually carried out, not in factories, but at the homes of the workers. They have what are called squad tailors, perhaps seven or eight people who deal in these small contracts; one of the members of these squads takes machining, another the pressing, another the felling, another the button-holing, and so on...<sup>40</sup>

Military clothing was also produced in new factories which drew in and created a new group of young coloured women to work in factories at very low wages.

The established firms first did a large quantity of military work, but reduced the scope of their tenders when competition forced prices down to the lowest level. The bulk of their output was in special orders and in a limited range of ready-made clothing. There were in Cape Town at least five factories which employed between 100 and 200 workers. The African Clothing Co. was one of the best equipped. Established in 1911 as "the pioneer ready-made clothing factory of South Africa"<sup>41</sup> it employed one hundred

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39. S.C. 4 - 1917, Mr. H. Beynon, p.16.

40. Ibid., p.21.

41. South African Commerce and Manufacturers' Record August 1916, p.284.

and fifty workers in a specialised production system. The factory was visited in 1916 by one Thos. H. Lewis, who reported in part as follows:

The whirr of machinery greeted our entry into the machining department. I had heard so much of the conditions which usually occur in the machining-rooms of tailoring factories, that I was most agreeably surprised to find myself in a spacious, high-roofed, well lighted and excellently ventilated room in which blended, not unpleasantly, the jingle and hum of hundreds of machines of all makes and sizes...I threaded my way through lines of cheerful-faced machinists, and was specially interested in the working of the button-sewing, button-holing, felling, patent blind-stitching (the only one in the country), tacking and binding machines. For my special edification, specimens of the work of each machine were shown by nimble-fingered operators, whose deftness in handling them astonished me.<sup>42</sup>

If physical conditions in the larger factories were good, wages were still very low, as low as four shillings a week for beginners.

The 'better class of trade' was still the preserve of tailors and, as in 1906, it drew almost exclusively on the labour of out-workers and sub-contractors. However there had been a considerable erosion of white tailors. One tailor stated:

About seven years ago we had a union in Cape Town and we had about 600 members who were white European tailors. Now I do not think there will be more than 75 to one hundred of such members.<sup>43</sup>

This decline in the number of white tailors was attributed to competition from the Malay tailors who undercut their prices.<sup>44</sup>

The First World War provided South African manufacturers with the opportunity to produce clothing profitably on a wider

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42. South African Commerce and Manufacturers' Record August 1916, p.286

43. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. J. Folk, p.84.

44. Ibid., p.82.

scale than before. But it was not only the artificial protection afforded by the War which made this possible. The War years saw a deterioration in working conditions as military uniform production "introduced into Cape Town some of the worst elements in the trade such as we have always been accustomed to understand obtain in Great Britain and other large industrial countries".<sup>45</sup> There was a reduction in the real wages of workers. To further reduce costs, cheap coloured and young women workers were introduced into factory labour on a large scale.

W.M. Middlemass, the head of A. Fraser & Co. and later chairman of the Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers' Association (1925), stated:

I am sure that if you make inquiries into the conditions under which a large quantity of the clothing is made in Cape Town you will be surprised. There is no supervision, and arrangements for sanitation leave much to be desired. From my own knowledge I can say that the hours worked in some of these places are terrible. There is no limit whatever. They work Saturday afternoons and Sundays too; if you go through the town you can hear the machines working all over the place, perhaps more in little workshops than in private houses. I do not know anything about private houses. Our business was founded in 1907. I do think conditions in the tailoring trade have become worse since then.<sup>46</sup>

Several witnesses even stated that in some areas, conditions in Cape Town were worse than in Britain.<sup>47</sup>

The wages of factory workers varied from 4 shillings a week for young girls of 14 or 15 who were just starting in the trade to 18 to 25 shillings for qualified women machinists. Boys who started work at 13 or 14 earned 5 shillings a week to start with and then 30 to 70 shillings once they had qualified at the age

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45. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. W. Marshall MPC, p.24.

46. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. W.M. Middlemass (rendered Middleman in the Minutes), p.88.

47. Julius Folk said: "I know a good deal about the tailoring trade of this class in England, and I should say that the conditions are worse here than in the Old Country." (S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, p.82).



of 20 or so. Pieceworkers, who were paid according to a log, were said to earn similar wages. However, it is hard to draw much meaning from these figures. Wages varied widely between seasons. Workers on short-time received much less, as did tailors and outworkers who failed to get as much work as they wanted to do. Wages, prices and hours of work fluctuated over time and between the different classes of trade and the race of the operatives - coloured workers in general received less than whites. In many cases, hours and wages had stayed more or less the same since 1900 but the cost of living had risen sharply. Prices rose by approximately forty per cent between 1910 and 1917. At this time a "European of low type" was said to need 22/6 if she were to support herself.<sup>48</sup> It seems that less than half of the factory workers received a wage approaching this level.<sup>49</sup> But undoubtedly the most significant factor in the profitable expansion of the clothing industry was the use which factory owners were able to make of the labour of young girls still living at home.

The first reason why the level of wages was so low was that factories took care to employ girls who were living at home and who therefore did not have to bear the full costs of the reproduction of their labour power. Beynon explained:

Most of these girls it must be remembered, live with their parents, and reputable firms in town, when they engage a girl as apprentice, always ask who she is living with and who her parents are, so as to ensure there is sufficient support.<sup>50</sup>

Middlemass stated:

A girl of 14 years of age will have somebody to look after her, she will not be on her own....A girl cannot live on 5s. a week, to one who is dependent upon herself we would have to pay 25s. a week, but, of course, a girl at that age must live with her parents.<sup>51</sup>

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48. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. H. Beynon, p.20.

49. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. M. Torbin, p.57.

50. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. H. Beynon, p.20.

51. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. W.M. Middlemass, p.91-92.

Middlemass also stated:

I certainly do not contend that a girl can live decently on 10s. a week. I do not however look upon it as a serious thing that a large number are being paid no more than that. The majority of these girls live with their families and have their parents behind them.<sup>52</sup>

The head of a firm of clothing retailers said:

A girl cannot live respectably on £2.10s. a month, unless, of course, she is living with her parents. We should not engage a hand who had to support herself unless we paid what we considered a living wage of from £6 to £8 a month...If we could not pay a girl that who had to support herself we should not engage her. We should engage others at a lower salary if they were living with their parents.<sup>53</sup>

The second reason for the low level of wages is found in the use manufacturers made of so-called "learners". There is no apprenticeship system in the wholesale clothing industry as the processes involved are divided and sub-divided and workers require little instruction.<sup>54</sup> Speed and accuracy, the most valued attributes of the machinist, come mainly from practice. However factory owners still insist on a period of 'learnership' during which productive workers can be paid at lower learners rates. In 1917, for example, some factories engaged young learners at 5 shillings a week and then edged them up to 17/6 or 20 shillings over three to four years.<sup>55</sup> One factory manager stated:

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52. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. W.M. Middlemass, p.87.

53. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. G. Davidson, p.103.

54. The Clothing Section of the CCI wrote to the Juvenile Affairs Board in 1923: "Many of the processes today are operated by automatic machinery, needing little knowledge and little guidance, and experience has shown that the idea of fixing a term of apprenticeship for such labour is entirely out of the question and thoroughly impracticable." (Letter from W.J. Laite, 15 March 1923, CCI Archives M1/1).

55. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, M. W. Marshall MPC, p.25.

...there are firms today who are employing what are called learners, whom they pay 5s. a week. When they have been at one place a while, these girls can do a fair amount of work for the particular firm by whom they are employed. When they ask for an advance they are refused in most cases. They are told they are learners, and the wages they are being paid is all that the firm can do for them. If they do not like it they must leave. It is practically impossible for them to leave for they are badly in need of the money, and they have only learnt a certain thing to do to that garment. They are no good to other firms, because the firms do not work alike<sup>56 57</sup>.

Learners were by no means assured of a steady advance up the learners wage scale. Factory owners would protest that girls had not the ability to earn a higher wage.<sup>58</sup> A tailor explained:

If you look at the vacancies advertised in the papers you will see that they are for girls leaving school to learn the trade. The reason is that after they have worked for one of these firms a few months and they are beginning to get on and there is the prospect of them asking for more wages, more girls are advertised for and as those in work cannot get other work to do, they think they might as well go on working at these low rates offered. That is the game of the manufacturers, and they are in a position to do as they like in the matter.<sup>59</sup>

There was no trade union or other organization which looked after

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56. Meaning that other firms would only agree to take such a worker on at a learners starting rate.

57. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, M. W. Crathorne, p.61.

58. The Clothing Section of the CCI wrote in 1923: "...where a girl, through lack of ability or possessed with an incurably lazy disposition, or owing to careless conduct and inattentive habits, is perforce compelled to confine her activities to single processes of a simple nature, it is out of the question of any employer to be compelled to pay her a higher wage for her labour than its market value." (W.J. Laite to Juvenile Affairs Board, 15 March 1923, CCI Archives, M1).

59. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr.J. Folk, p.79.

the interests of these workers. Along with their counterparts in the printing and sweetmaking trades they were described as being "often in a hopeless condition, particularly when they get into the hands of the lower class of employers in certain districts".<sup>60</sup> Several witnesses said that as a result of the low wages many girls were "driven to immorality".<sup>61</sup>

Coloured women were subjected to the most intense exploitation. The lower the grade of business, the greater the proportion of coloured labour. Some factory owners said that coloured workers could be paid a lower wage because they had a lower standard of living. One said:

I do not think a decent girl over 18 years of age could live on 10s. a week but the minimum is intended to apply to the other class; they can live on less, living as they do.<sup>62</sup>

With regard to men workers he said:

...if I pay a coloured man at the rate of 30s. a week he is quite satisfied and lives comfortably on it, it is a living for him whereas I must pay a white man £3.10s. or £4, and that is only a bare living for him.<sup>63</sup>

Several witnesses who referred to the lower level of coloured workers' wages contended that these workers were not able to produce as much as their white counterparts.<sup>64</sup> But Middlemass stated with confidence:

I do not think there is much difference between the amount of work which our white employees can get through as compared with similar workers in England, and I think the coloured worker is every bit as good. We do not discriminate; the coloured worker is as efficient as the white worker.<sup>65</sup>

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60. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. H. Beynon, p.16.

61. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mrs. A. Cooke, p.72; Rev. C. Davies, p.74; Mr. I Rosenbloum, p.77.

62. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. M. Torbin, p.58.

63. Ibid., p.52.

64. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, Mr. M. Tobin, p.52-53; Mr. W. Cra-thorne, p.62; Mr. J. Folk, p.83.

65. S.C. 4 - 1917, Evidence, p.89-90.

The Select Committee heard evidence in April 1917, just before labour organization in Cape Town leapt forward under the influence of the conditions surrounding the end of the First World War. (See Chapter two). Despite the evidence presented to the committee about the helplessness and unorganizability of tailoring workers, especially those at the lower end of the trade, these workers were the backbone of a new Tailors' and Tailoress' Union (TTU) which was formed in mid-1917.<sup>66</sup> The Union was short-lived. It was very much the product of wartime conditions. But it was involved in a remarkable strike, possibly the first strike of clothing factory workers in the country, which provides further insights into conditions in the clothing trades in 1917.<sup>67</sup>

The TTU was composed largely of coloured workers from the "second class" trade. It appears to have included some journeymen and their helpers or employees as well as indoor factory workers. From the start the Union was affiliated to the Cape Federation of Labour Unions (CFLU) but its affairs were closely managed by its chairman/secretary M.A. Gamiet, sometime president of the Cape Malay Association<sup>68</sup>. The CFLU was a loosely structured co-ordinating body for trade unions in Cape Town. Its secretary was Robert Stuart.

The new Union first secured a substantial membership in two factories, those of A.E. Mendelsohn in Burg Street and Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop in Loop Street.<sup>69</sup> It then asked Stuart to write a circular letter to all the clothing firms in Cape Town to inform them that:

...the members of the Tailors' and Tailoress' Union respectfully ask all employers in the Tailoring Trade for an advance in wages of 30 per cent.<sup>70</sup>

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66. Cape Argus 23 October 1917.

67. The only substantial sources of information on the strike are the Cape Times and the Cape Argus.

68. The Sun 26 August 1932.

69. Letter from the A.E. Mendelsohn Co. to the Secretary, CFLU, 8 October 1917 (Ac2, TUCSA Archives); Cape Times 24 October 1917.

70. Letter from Stuart, Secretary, CFLU to various clothing manufacturers in Cape Town, 2 October 1917 (Ac2, TUCSA Archives).

The request referred to the 33 per cent increase in the cost of living which a recent Parliamentary Select Committee had found to have occurred since 1914. The TTU said it would send the names of all firms which agreed to increase wages to,

...the government and other institutions asking them that before accepting tenders to favourably consider firms that have agreed to the increase.<sup>71</sup>

Several firms replied to Stuart's letter. None agreed to the increase and all indicated they were paying more than in 1914 and that they paid the best wages they could at the time.<sup>72</sup> A.E. Mendelsohn wrote that:

...we are (as far as we know) the only 'Union' shop in Cape Town, and have already increased our wages to the extent of about 25%...<sup>73</sup>

Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop replied that they were paying more than before the War. Much of their work was sub-contracted out and the firm stated:

...our prices are mutually agreed upon between the workers and ourselves before we tender for anything big.<sup>74</sup>

On Monday 22nd October 1917, all the indoor workers at Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop and Mendelsohn's responded to a Union call to come out on strike in support of higher wages. The Cape Argus commented that it had been

...known for some time that dissatisfaction existed, especially among workers in factories on government contracts.<sup>75</sup>

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71. Letter from Stuart, Secretary, CFLU to various clothing manufacturers in Cape Town, 2 October 1917 (Ac2, TUCSA Archives).

72. Letters to CFLU from Garlick's Store, 11 October 1917; The A.E. Mendelsohn Co., 8 October 1917; Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop, 6 October 1917; Hepworths Ltd., 5 October 1917; M. Bertish & Co.(SA) Ltd., 17 October 1917; Phoenix Manufacturing Co.Ltd., 4 October 1917 (Ac2, TUCSA Archives).

73. Letter to CFLU, 8 October 1917 (Ac2, TUCSA Archives).

74. Letter to CFLU, 6 October 1917 (Ac2, TUCSA Archives).

75. Cape Argus 22 October 1917.

Garnet stated that at the start of the War up to 4 shillings was paid for a tunic. Instead of rising to keep pace with the cost of living, the price had fallen,

...to the terribly low figure of 1s.3d. which does not allow of the employees obtaining sufficient to live upon.<sup>76</sup>

A mass meeting for workers and the public was held that night on the Parade. As it rained, the meeting was moved to the Trades Hall which was "crowded to excess".<sup>77</sup> A resolution was passed that,

This meeting of citizens pledge themselves to support the strike in the tailoring trade and will help them morally and financially to the best of our ability until a living wage for workers is obtained.<sup>78</sup>

The meeting called on the government "not to issue contracts to firms not paying a living wage".<sup>79</sup>

Initially the strike involved about 200 workers just from the Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop and Mendelsohn factories. The majority of strikers were coloured and a large proportion were "girls".<sup>80</sup> The Cape Argus commented that,

For the first time in the history of Cape Town, a trade union largely composed of Non-Europeans has called its members out as a protest against the conditions of labour.<sup>81</sup>

The strike occurred at a time when the industry was extremely busy and moreover in the context of a growing militancy amongst Cape Town workers.

Both Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop and Mendelsohn's said they saw no reason for the strike and the press printed their refutations of every argument raised by the Union. They denied they paid

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76. Cape Argus 22 October 1917.

77. Cape Argus 23 October 1917.

78. Cape Times 23 October 1917.

79. Ibid.

80. Cape Times 24 October 1917.

81. Cape Argus 24 October 1917.

wages as low as the Union alleged. They invited the inspection of their wage registers and gave examples of wages paid to workers in their factories. These appeared to support their denials of underpayment. Mendelsohn said that most workers had been

...compelled to strike in sympathy with one or two malcontents who for their own ends have engineered the movement.<sup>82</sup>

He complained that he had negotiated wages with the workers and it was "unfair" that they should strike.<sup>83</sup>

Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop said they had received a "very amateurish" and "unworkable"<sup>84</sup> set of rules and prices drawn up by the TTU on the Saturday morning. The TTU demanded acceptance of this by 4 p.m. on the same day, or a strike would occur. Some of the demands were for increases of between 100 and 150 per cent. The firm protested that most of their work was wholesale bespoke tailoring and that they did very little contract work. They also regularly gave increases when requested. Their feeling was that they and Mendelsohn's were being "victimized"<sup>85</sup>.

...(We) have been selected as a start off because nearly all our employees are union members and therefore readily controllable.<sup>86</sup>

The TTU arranged peaceful picketing at both factories to prevent "blacklegging". Gamiet rejected the arguments of the employers. He said that the wages they had quoted from their register were for outworkers who still had to pay their helpers.<sup>87</sup> A letter to the Cape Argus accused Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop of lying.

The production of a wage register proves nothing. Payment is by piecework and when 6 o'clock comes, jobs are put up and taken to the workers' homes, where the said workers employ other workers.<sup>88</sup>

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82. Cape Times 24 October 1917.

83. Cape Argus 23 October 1917.

84. Cape Times 24 October 1917.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. Cape Times 25 October 1917.

88. Cape Argus 25 October 1917.



An editorial in the Argus commented that the statements of the workers and employers were "totally and irreconcilably at variance".<sup>89</sup> However, it was clear that over the previous few years,

...the sweating system has been creeping into the cheap tailoring trade in the Cape Peninsula and for this highly undesirable state of affairs the Government are chiefly responsible.<sup>90</sup>

The editorial called for new preventive legislation.

At the end of the first week of the strike, a mass meeting was held in a crowded Metropolitan Hall.<sup>91</sup> Gamiet paraded on the stage girls and boys aged between 12 and 14 years, who earned from 3/6 to 6/- a week. The Dean of Cape Town made an impassioned plea for a living wage and an end to cut-throat competition. He said that a law should be enacted to end these conditions.<sup>92</sup> His remarks were endorsed by A.F. Batty from the CFLU and Dr. Abdurahman. Mr. Hogsett attended the meeting and was allowed to speak from the floor. He said he had received no complaints from his workers and paid as well as other firms. He could not afford to pay more as long as his rivals paid less.<sup>93</sup>

Both Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop and Mendelsohn's refused to negotiate on the wage issue until all workers returned to work. So, at a mass meeting in the Trades Hall, a resolution was passed calling on workers in other firms in the "second class trade" (who were mainly engaged in contract work) to join the strike.<sup>94</sup>

On Tuesday morning 30th October, another 800 workers came out in support of the TTU wage demands. The strike now included virtually all clothing workers in Cape Town except for those in the higher class trade. At 12.30 p.m. strikers gathered on the Parade.

Headed by a sergeant and two mounted constables, they marched, via Darling and Adderley Streets, along the

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89. Cape Argus 26 October 1917.

90. Ibid.

91. Cape Times 27 October 1917.

92. Ibid.

93. Cape Argus 27 October 1917.

94. Cape Times 30 October 1917.

Dock-road and up Buitengracht Street, lustily singing.<sup>95</sup>

"Britons never shall be slaves" was the marching song. A banner reading "Down With Sweating" was prominently displayed.<sup>96</sup> The Cape Argus reported that:

There were a good many Europeans in the procession but the bulk of the women wore doeks and the fez ruled amongst the men. A noticeable feature,...was the number of Malay boys and girls (presumably strikers) who looked of school-going age.

After the march, the Mayor of Cape Town, Harry Hands, called a meeting between the TTU leaders and representatives of the "Clothing Manufacturers' Association" which had just been formed under the auspices of the Cape Chamber of Industries.<sup>98</sup> The employers insisted that all workers should return to work before they would negotiate wages but promised an increase and no victimization.<sup>99</sup> This offer was accepted by a mass meeting of workers. Work was resumed after only two days of 'general strike'.<sup>100</sup> The wage increases the employers agreed to were not disclosed but, said the Cape Argus, were "understood to be very satisfactory to the employees."<sup>101</sup>

The "tailors' strike" was among the first of a continuous series of strikes and disputes in Cape Town industry that lasted until 1920. During these few years, new unions were formed and

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95. Cape Argus 30 October 1917.

96. Cape Times 31 October 1917.

97. Cape Argus 30 October 1917.

98. See Chapter 2.

99. Cape Argus 1 November 1917. It is not clear from the press reports what the employers' attitude was to the workers' demand that their union be recognized by the employers.

100. On 5 November, workers at the Phoenix and Union Clothing factories came out on strike again as their employers had gone back on the agreement. These disputes were resolved by negotiation between the "Clothing Manufacturers' Association" and the TTU. All workers were back at work on 8 November. (Cape Times 6 November 1917; 7 November 1917; Cape Argus 7 November 1917; 9 November 1917).

101. Cape Argus 9 November 1917.

old unions grew stronger. But the TTU, despite its early promise, faded away during 1918. By January 1919 it "had gone out of existence".<sup>102</sup> Although the Union, through the strike, caused the major clothing manufacturers in Cape Town to come together as a unit for the first time, it was not well enough organized to participate in one of the semi-formal "conciliation boards" which were set up in several trades after 1918 to resolve labour disputes.<sup>103</sup>

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102. CFLU Minutes: 21 January 1919 (TUCSA Archives).

103. See Chapter 2.

In view of the later importance of Robert Stuart in the history of the garment workers, it is interesting to record his memories of the 1917 strike. They were written in 1950.

'After the establishment of a Trade Union for Garment Workers, demands were submitted to the Employers for increased wages, shorter hours and improved working conditions generally. The Employers claimed that the Industry could not bear the additional costs of higher wage rates, and better working conditions, and they accordingly rejected demands in toto. A strike resulted, and was completely effective throughout the entire Industry. But it was obvious that the stoppage could not last for long. The newly formed Union was exceedingly weak financially, with the result that no strike pay could be paid; appeals to other Unions evoked no assistance whatsoever from them. The Clothing Industry, at that time, was of such small dimensions, and the Employees engaged therein so relatively few in number, that it was impossible to stimulate any interest in, or concern for, them among the other Trade Unions functioning here. In these circumstances, the inexorable pressure of economic circumstance soon began to exert its effect and, after the strike had been in progress for a very short time, the Employees expressed their wish and intention to resume work again. This, of course, would have spelt a crushing and ignominious defeat for the striking Employees. Fortunately, however, the Mayor of Cape Town was approached and was asked to intervene in the strike. He agreed to do so, and he summoned representatives of both parties to the dispute with the result that, after several hours of negotiation, a settlement was reached. I cannot recall the precise terms of the settlement which were, later, submitted to the Employees at a meeting of the Union which was held in the Metropolitan Hall, Burg Street, Cape Town. I outlined, and explained the terms of settlement to the Members present who declared themselves to be satisfied with the settlement. There were, however, several persons present at the meeting, who were not employed in the Clothing Industry, and who were in no way connected with it. These outsiders, however, were very vocal and severe in their condemnation of the terms of settlement and, in the course of their addresses to the meeting, they urged my replacement as Secretary by someone who was more conversant with the Clothing Industry and who would, therefore, be able to promote the interests

#### 4 A False Start: 1918 to 1925

Several of the witnesses who appeared before the 1917 select committee on the Regulation of Wages Bill expressed doubt that the South African clothing industry would survive after the War ended if tariff protection were not imposed against imports. However, the economic boom after 1918, and the demand for peace-time clothing allowed the local industry to grow still more. Factories complained continually about the shortage of raw materials and machinery.<sup>104</sup> William Freestone, the "Inspector of White Labour" reported in late 1919 that the clothing factories were extremely busy:

The Trade expresses little fear of foreign competition. Opinions are expressed that the trade is fairly launched and safely through initial difficulties. With a good supply of labour and fair conditions, confidence in the

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of the Employees engaged therein more effectively. The suggestion that I should relinquish the position as Secretary came as a great relief to me, and I told the meeting so. A new Secretary was accordingly appointed, whose identity I already knew prior to the meeting and, after the usual vote of thanks had been proposed to the Chairman, the meeting closed. Although I no longer held any official position in the Garment Workers' Union, I maintained my interest in its activities and closely followed its progress under the new leadership. It soon became apparent that the activities of the newly appointed Secretary were being confined to weekly visits to the factories for the purpose of collecting the contributions of members. Besides this, nothing whatsoever was attempted or achieved, with the result that the members lost heart and interest and the Union ultimately went completely out of existence. Thus ended the first chapter of the narrative insofar as trade union organisation amongst the garment workers was concerned. I had been charged with being insufficiently militant by a group of people who did not know the elementary meaning of militancy. They had undertaken to demonstrate the glittering benefits which they would be able to secure for the members. In the event they accomplished exactly nothing'. (Stuart, 1950i)

There is no record in the press or in the CFLU Minutes of Stuart ever being the Secretary of the TTU. His account of the Metropolitan Hall meeting has no echoes in the reports of the Cape Times and Cape Argus.

104. Cape Chamber of Industries Annual Reports, August 1918, p.28; August 1919, p.43 (CCI Archives).

future is felt.<sup>105</sup>

The Cape Chamber of Industries reported that the factories had "proved themselves capable of supplying all needs of the country in the way of ready-made clothing."<sup>106</sup> New factories were in "the process of completion" as late as August 1920.<sup>107</sup> The future was anticipated with unbridled optimism.

The crisis which hit the world economy in 1920 affected the Cape Town clothing factories very severely. The Clothing Section of the CCI stated that "a very dismal change" had come over the industry.

The expansion of our trade came to a sudden stop, and a current in the opposite direction began to flow with increasing force with the result that many of the smaller factories that came into existence during the last year or two have closed down. It is doubtful if in Cape Town at least there is a larger number in actual operation than in 1914.<sup>108</sup>

In addition to the effects which price fluctuations and unemployment had on the demand for clothing, demand was reduced by the importation of greatly increased volumes of second-hand clothing.<sup>109</sup> Factory owners once more bemoaned the lack of protective tariffs.

The depressed condition of the trade is in part due to the utterly absurd tariff. The finished article is admitted to this country at the same rate as a proportion only of the raw materials of our industry. For the rest of these an increased duty of 5% is charged. Not only is there therefore no protection, but on a

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105. Cape Times 16 December 1919.

106. CCI Annual Report: August 1920, p.44.

107. Ibid.

108. CCI Annual Report: December 1921, p.41.

109. CCI Clothing Section Minutes: 26 April 1920 - C1/1. The physical volume of second-hand clothing increased from ,485m units in 1919 to 1,786m in 1920. It remained above ,7m until 1925 when it began to fall, reaching ,2m by 1931 and ,1m by 1939. (Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa).

considerable proportion of our raw materials we are actually penalised 5%. The 'encouragement' promised to South African industries savours too much of an 'Irishman's rise'. It is hoped that this anomaly at least will soon disappear. With assistance in this direction, even of the slightest, a large trade could be done in South African ready-made garments with increased employment of which the limits are difficult to estimate.<sup>110</sup>

But no such initiative came from the South African Party government. The factories which survived the depression struggled on, fighting one another and overseas contractors for government work and selling ready-makes and special orders as best they could. Once the state did, in 1925, introduce its policy of encouraging local industry by means of protective tariffs, the clothing industry expanded rapidly, scarcely being checked even by the depression of the 1930's.

Clothing became one of the first areas of import substitution in the South African economy because the industry was based on relatively low-level technology. No special or expensive machinery had to be imported to establish the industry. Usually, the competitive advantage of the imports from an industrialized country in the periphery result from the superior technology of the metropole and the ability to take still greater advantage of the economies of scale in producing for a mass market. In the case of clothing imports into South Africa in the first quarter of this century, the competitive advantage of Britain did not arise from technology but from lower labour costs. A Cape Town manufacturers' journal commented in 1907 that much of the shirts, tailoring and cotton goods exported from England was made by sweated labour,

...employed at pittances which even the meanest and most woe-begone Kaffir in this country would turn up his nose at, in scorn and contempt. Yet it is this iniquitous and hideous system - battened upon the blood

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110. CCI Annual Report: 1922 December, p.25.

and tears of the weak and helpless - which is responsible for the cheapness of much of the goods with which our industries, unprotected, cannot compete....for sweated labour, at least in the opening stages of development of a country, is impossible.<sup>111</sup>

To compete with imports, South African clothing manufacturers had to push wages down to very low levels. They were unable to find sufficient suitable labour at these rates to allow the industry a firm base for expansion. The state could not be pressurized into using its resources to recruit low wage workers for the clothing factories in a similar manner to that in which it assisted the mines. Quite apart from the influence exercised over state policy by merchant capitalists, almost all the clothing needs of the country could be easily and cheaply imported. After 1925, legislation prevented the large scale emergence of outwork or the extremes of sweating to which the industry tended once tariff protection opened up a larger share of the market to locally produced clothing. This is not to downplay the extremely bad conditions under which workers in the new clothing factories lived and worked. Their wages were low and their hours were long. In Cape Town workers crowded into houses near to the factories to save spending money on transport to work.<sup>112</sup> But it is noteworthy that clothing production in South Africa was, from the start, predominantly factory based and to this extent its path of development differed from that in Britain and New York. Outwork was "common"<sup>113</sup> at certain stages in the development of the South African clothing industry, but it never became, as it did in London, "a substitute for the factory" (Schmiechen, 1975, p.266). In 1900 there were between 125 000 and 190 000 clothing workers in London. Between one half and three quarters of these were outworkers (Schmiechen, 1975, p.264). Also, while in Britain and the United States of America factory production began with

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111. S.A. Commerce & Manufacturers' Record September 1907, p.304. See also footnote 12, above.

112. Report of the Wage Board for 3 years ended February 1928, p.14- Annexure to the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Assembly Number 112 of 1929 (Second session) (Hereafter abbreviated as Annexure 112 - 1929).

113. Ibid., p.55.

the cheapest clothing and slowly moved up-market; in South Africa, the first factories could not possibly compete with cheap-clothing imports. This was accepted as a fact of life, as may be seen from this comment from a Cape Town manufacturers' journal in 1909 on the problems of the local clothing industry:

Ready-made and bespoke tailoring which is imported from Europe largely affects this trade. It would, we think, be unwise to further interfere with the importance of ready-made clothing which is a necessity to the poorer classes, but the practice adopted by the agents of over-sea tailors in taking measurements and importing the finished garment from abroad is open to serious objection.<sup>114</sup>

In South Africa, factory production began with wholesale bespoke tailoring, producing better-class garments. Local factories were only able to begin producing for the lower end of the market once tariff protection took effect.<sup>115</sup>

Tariff protection and industrial legislation played a crucial role in marking out the path of development for the clothing industry. The first made possible the production of clothing for a wider market, while the second countered (although not always immediately or directly) the natural tendency of the industry to drift into extremes of sweating and outwork. As in Britain, sweated labour and outwork was attacked first by legislation and only subsequently rendered less necessary by advances in technology and changes in the labour process. As industry in Cape Town and in South Africa has progressed past "the opening stages of development", the clothing industry has not needed, or been permitted, to degenerate into a 'sweated industry' in the old sense of the term. But since the Second World War, the real wages of clothing workers have shown a long-term tendency to decline. At the same time, the local industry has come to produce over

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114. S.A. Commerce & Manufacturers' Record July 1909.

115. It is even possible that the relative lack of "low-wage" labour compelled South African clothing firms to be more keen to adopt the latest technology than those in Britain. This impression is gained from the evidence of clothing manufacturers before the Customs Tariff Commission in 1934.



90 per cent of the country's clothing requirements.

Though the broad path of the South African clothing industry's development was indicated by tariff protection and industrial legislation, both of which applied to the whole country, the development of the industry in Cape Town was conditioned by factors specific to local conditions of class struggle. Having sketched the growth of the clothing industry in South Africa and in Cape Town, it is now necessary to turn to this aspect of history of Cape Town's tailoring and garment workers.

## CHAPTER II

SCENES FROM THE SOUTHERN SIDESHOWEconomic Class Struggle  
in Cape Town, 1900-1939

One cannot approach an understanding of the struggles of Cape Town clothing workers, of their inertia in the face of insupportable conditions of exploitation, of their forms of organization, without an appreciation of the general conditions of class struggle prevailing at the time. It is necessary to place the clothing workers in the context of the class struggle in Cape Town. This is not a simple task. There is no analytical writing on the class struggle in Cape Town in the period dealt with (nor indeed is there much after). Existing research on the labour history of Cape Town is patchy and insubstantial. The unearthing of the history of the common people in the Cape (and in much of South Africa), the understanding of the factors which conditioned the class struggle in Cape Town, is a task fraught with difficulties.

Although the details of much of what occurred may be unclear, there are several obvious and important observations which one can make about the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town. First, there is the fact that Cape Town never developed a substantial industrial base. Even today, the industrial profile of the Western Cape is composed of labour intensive consumer good industries and characterised in general more by competitive than monopoly capital. Second, most remarkably in South Africa, the class struggle in Cape Town was not manifested in a primarily racial form. The racial composition of Cape Town was different in an important way from all the other major centres. Although 'coloured' people were subject to racial oppression, this was accompanied by a limited access to the vote and the inclusion of the upper strata of coloured workers in the trade unions of the white workers. The class struggle in Cape Town never had the overwhelmingly racial form which marked struggles in the Transvaal. Third, we must note the failure of the working class (either as a whole or in part) to pose a serious challenge to the conditions of existence of the dominant class in Cape Town.

This last observation is thrown into stark relief when one compares the nature and intensity of struggles in Cape Town with those in the Transvaal, specifically those revolving around the mining industry. The Transvaal was the centre of the class struggles which shaped South African history before the Second World War and it is useful to take the Transvaal as a 'benchmark' for assessing the situation in Cape Town. The militancy, closeness of organization and strength which workers developed in the Transvaal (albeit a small fraction of the workforce) stands in sharp contrast to the situation in Cape Town. The resistance of black workers to selling their labour power to the mines and the efforts by the well-organized dominant classes to break this resistance also put a stamp on the intensity of class struggle in the Transvaal. If one accepts that the class struggle in Cape Town was of a 'low level of intensity' before 1939 (with the exception of the years 1917 to 1920) then why was this the case? In particular, why was the class struggle in Cape Town so much more muted than in the Transvaal?

It is not possible, given the present lack of research, to answer these questions fully or with certainty; but it is necessary that we at least begin to sketch out the determinants of the class struggle in Cape Town. These will be approached by brief accounts of firstly, the growth of manufacturing industry in Cape Town; secondly, the associations formed by employers to advance their interests; and thirdly, the fortunes of organized labour.

A central argument of this chapter is that the subordinate position of Cape Town in the South African social formation had significant effects on the class struggle in Cape Town. After Union in 1910 the effects were crucial. The rhythm of class struggles in South Africa after the Boer War was set in the countryside and in the mines and workshops of the Witwatersrand. The merchant and financial bourgeoisie of the Cape, which had long enjoyed dominance in a wide range of matters affecting the Cape Colony and the interior, occupied a relatively minor place in the power bloc which emerged after the Boer War. (Any apparent strength was the result of common interests with mining capital.) Before Union, contradictions within the colonial social formation found

their resolution within the colonial state apparatus which was dominated by comprador, trading and banking interests. The enactment of factory legislation, for example, could be considered in the light of Cape - Cape Town - conditions only. After Union, the resolution of specifically Cape contradictions was subordinated to the resolution of other contradictions which threatened the unity and integrity of the enlarged social formation. While the contradictions were manifest elsewhere, attempts at their resolution could but profoundly affect the class struggle in Cape Town. To acknowledge and illustrate the importance of such 'external factors' in the class struggle is only a first step. It is then necessary to account for the manner in which these external factors are 'internalized' in the class struggle in Cape Town (Poulantzas, 1977, p.22).

#### 1 Cape Town's Manufacturing Industries

Cape Town grew up as a port and as the seat of government. As the gateway for imports and immigrants and as a port of supply for ships, it was also an important centre of trade. As the oldest and best established town in South Africa it was a natural base for the commercial interests which first supervised imperialist expansion in South Africa.

It was around this site of trade, commerce and government that small manufacturing industries arose. Cape Town was endowed with no resources which made it a likely area for the growth of any major industry. Its position as a port made imports of manufactured goods by sea relatively cheap. Both of these factors retarded growth of industry and limited that which did arise to the consumer goods sector. At the time of the mineral discoveries in the interior, small food-processing enterprises and concerns producing furniture, leather work, coaches and wagons etc. were well established. However, it was not until the end of the century that factory production became common. By the 1890's, a manufacturers' association had been formed and was pressing for protective tariffs to be placed on imports to aid the growth of industries.

Plotting the industrial growth of Cape Town presents problems as adequate statistics do not exist. The 1904 Census indicates

that in that year there were 611 'Industrial Institutions' in Cape Town employing 11 700 people.<sup>1</sup> What these Institutions produced is only detailed for the Cape Colony as a whole, but from this list one can conclude that production did not extend much beyond printing, tailoring, light engineering and building, in addition to the sectors mentioned above.

#### 1a Employment

The First World War provided the major stimulus to the expansion of industry after the 1903 - 1909 depression disrupted the supply of imports and thus gave local industry a measure of artificial protection. By 1916/17, the date of the first Industrial Census to detail sectoral output and employment in Cape Town industry, there were 21 000 workers in industry.<sup>2</sup> Their number grew rapidly over the following three years to reach a total of 31 700 as the post-War boom reached its climax. Industrial employment declined during the following depression but had recovered to 34 900 by 1924/5. The policies of the Pact government produced a spurt of growth which ended in 1929/30 when 41 800 worked in the Cape Peninsula industries. The 1930 - 1932 depression wiped out the

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1. Cape of Good Hope: Census 1904, Part XI.
  2. All the statistics in sections a, b, c, and d come from the annual Statistics of Production listed in the bibliography. After 1915 an Industrial Census was taken annually, except during the period 1930-32. The published results only rarely gave details for Cape Town alone so I have used the figures given for the 'Cape Peninsula' or 'Cape Western'. This includes the Cape Peninsula proper, Somerset West, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Wellington and Malmesbury. It is not clear that exactly the same area is included each year. The industries deemed to constitute the various sectors in the statistics were changed on occasion, thus distorting comparisons of industrial sectors over time and, in the case of engineering and light and power, making such comparisons impossible. Strictly speaking it is not admissible to use the statistics as I do below. The trends indicated may be true but it would require independent information to be sure of this. None of the trends I draw out in the text conflict with general impressions I have gained while reading material touching on Cape Town industry before the Second World War; nor do they conflict with van den Bogaerde (1957) - although this study of Western Cape Private Industry is based entirely on these same statistics.

employment growth achieved in the previous five years; but it was followed by five years of rapid growth which boosted industrial employment to 56 200 by 1937/8.

From 1916/7 until 1929/30 the annual rate of growth<sup>3</sup> in employment in industry in the Cape Peninsula stayed just ahead of the national average, but the region was harder hit by the great depression than the rest of the country and its recovery afterwards was slightly slower. So while the Cape Peninsula had accounted for 17% of employment in South African industry in 1916/17 and 19% in 1929/30, by 1937/8 its contributions had fallen to 16%.

Table 2.1: Industrial Employment in the Cape Peninsula by Sector

Sectors	1916/7		1924/5		1937/8		Annual average % growth rate (21 years)
	No.'00s*	%	No.'00s	%	No.'00s	%	
Raw material	2	1	3	1	1	0	-3,2
Stone & Clay	3	1	12	3	30	5	11,5
Wood	10	5	10	3	15	2	1,9
Metal & Engineering	36	17	22	6**	33	6**	
Food & Drink	49	23	74	21	91	16	3
Clothing & Textiles	24	12	30	9	91	16	6,3
Books & Printing	19	9	26	7	43	8	4
Vehicles	3	1	8	2	23	4	12
Furniture	10	5	18	5	21	4	3,6
Chemicals	6	3	18	5	25	4	7
Light & Power	6	3	1	0**	3	0**	
Leather	12	6	14	4	25	4	3,5
Building	20	10	28	8	71	13	6,2
Other	0	0	5	1	1	0	-
Total	210	95	349	77	561	84	4,7
Govt. workshops	?	?	77	22	89 ?	16 ?	

\* 0 indicates 0 to 99 employed  
1 indicates 100 to 199 employed etc.

\*\* Figure totally distorted as sectoral details exclude government workers, who are a significant proportion of the workforce in these sectors (see footnote 4).

3. The annual average rate of growth between two dates is calculated as:  $r = 1 - \left( \frac{Y_n}{Y_0} \right)^{1/n}$  where  $Y_0$  is the figure for the earlier date,  $Y_n$  for the later date, and  $n$  the number of years separating the two.  $r$  is expressed as a percentage.

In common with the country as a whole, the sectoral spread of industry in the Cape Peninsula did not change significantly in the inter-war period, beyond a sharp decline in the importance of food processing. This sector showed a relative decline from employing 23% of Cape Peninsula industrial workers in 1916/17 to 16% in 1937/8. In the rest of the country the fall was from 20% to 13% over the same period. Neither in Cape Town nor elsewhere was there a single branch of industry which emerged as a 'leading sector'. In the Cape Peninsula, clothing, vehicles, chemicals, building and quarrying all displayed rates of growth of employment greater than the average 4,7% per annum over the 21 years from 1916/17 to 1937/8.

In 1916/17 and in 1924/25 the four industrial main sectors were food & drink; metal & engineering; clothing; and building. Together they accounted for 62% of workers in industry in 1916/17 and probably slightly fewer in 1924/25.<sup>4</sup> By 1937/38 the clothing industry (including laundries and textile factories) employed as many workers as the food and drink sector. These were followed in importance by metal & engineering and building. These four sectors accounted for about 55% of industrial employment in the Cape Peninsula.

#### 1b Output

When one examines the structure of Cape Peninsula industry in terms of the relative contributions of the various sectors to total output, the picture is different. The food and drink sector emerges clearly as the most important branch of industry.

Cape Peninsula industry as a whole displayed a 167% growth in employment and a 226% growth in the (money) value of output over the 21 years 1916/17 to 1937/38. The increase in productivity (measured as output per head) varied considerably between sectors; from about 37% for clothing and 55% for food, to 121% and 194% for printing and chemicals respectively.

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4. The published results of the Industrial Census are not consistent in including or excluding government and railway workers in 'industrial workshops' from the statistics. This can lead to significant errors. For example, in 1924/5 such workers made up 22% of the industrial workforce in the Cape Peninsula but details of the sectors in which they worked are not provided. In later years government workers were about 14% of the workforce.

In general, over the entire period from 1900 to 1939, Cape Town industry expanded greatly, but the expansion was based on the same industrial sectors which were dominant in the early years of the century. There was little broadening of the industrial base beyond consumer goods production, construction and service activities for the railways and shipping.

Table 2.2: Percentage Contribution of Certain Sectors to Total Output of Cape Peninsula Industry

Sectors	1916/17	1924/25	1937/38	** Annual average % rate of growth of output
Raw material	2	2	1	2
Stone & Clay	1	2	2	10
Wood	5	33	33	3
Metal & Engineering	13	5	6	*
Food & Drink	39	45	35	5
Clothing & Textiles	7	6	11	8
Books & Printing	7	9	9	7
Vehicles	1	1	3	10
Furniture	4	5	4	5
Chemicals	5	11	10	10
Light & Power	4	1	3	*
Leather	5	4	4	4
Building	7	5	10	7
Other	0	2	0	-
Total Output (£ m)	8,4	14,7	27,4	All 5,7 % sectors

\* Meaningful figure cannot be calculated from the data available (see footnote 4)

\*\* Annual average rate of growth of output between 1916/7 and 1937/8, expressed as a percentage.

#### 1c Employment by Race

On the Transvaal gold mines and in Transvaal industry, the racial division of the workforce coincided to a very large extent with divisions of labour between skilled and unskilled workers, or between supervisors and workers. On the mines there was even a further tribal division of labour, with certain jobs becoming



the preserve of certain tribes. The importance and function of any racial divisions of labour in Cape Town industry was never as clear cut as in the Transvaal. In Cape Town, there were coloured artisans who were skilled workers in most trades and industries. White unskilled or less-skilled workers worked alongside coloured workers in at least the garment and food and drink sectors.

It is not possible to use official statistics to make more specific comments on racial aspects of the division of labour. The figures in Table 2.3 below are given as a matter of form and not because the main divisions in the working class in Cape Town coincide with the differences in race. The majority of Cape Town unions did not exclude workers on the grounds of race. The Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula, which was formed in 1927, was non-racial from the outset. Throughout the period covered by the thesis, Cape Town factories, where they employed workers of different races, were 'integrated'. This contrasts with the position in the Transvaal where African men did the pressing and where coloured garment workers were separated from white workers both in the factories and in a separate union branch.

Over the period 1916 to 1938 about 60% of the labour force was black and 40% white. Relatively more whites were employed in the metal & engineering, printing and vehicle sectors. After 1924, relatively more blacks came to be employed in construction. Africans made up only 4% of the industrial labour force (i.e. this figure excludes dock-workers) in 1916 but after 1924 they accounted for about 14%. They worked mainly in the quarrying, food & drink, construction and chemical (Somerset West) sectors. No African women worked in industry during this period.

#### 1d Women Workers

One of the most remarkable facts about Cape Town industry throughout the period 1916 to 1938 is the relatively large proportion of women workers in the labour force. This proportion varied between about 18 and 28 per cent, while in the rest of the country women made up less than 10 per cent of the labour force. To an extent this is simply a reflection of the dominance of industries which employ relatively more women workers - such as food & canning and clothing. But it is also an indication of the earlier move

Table 2.3: Racial Distribution of Jobs - Certain Industrial Sectors

	1916/7			1924/5			1937/38		
	% white	% black	Sectoral distribution of blacks	% white	% black	Sectoral distribution of blacks	% white	% black	Sectoral distribution of blacks
Metal & Engineering	64	36	9	52	48	4	50	50	4
Food & Drink	32	68	29	27	73	24	32	68	18
Clothing & Textiles	41	59	13	35	65	9	46	54	15
Books & Printing	55	45	8	52	48	6	57	43	5
Vehicles	54	46	2	55	45	2	57	43	2
Furniture	38	62	5	33	67	5	43	57	3
Chemicals	26	74	4	29	71	6	70	30	6
Leather	31	69	6	32	68	4	48	42	4
Building	31	69	6	29	71	9	24	76	18
Other			18			14			18
All Sectors	43	57	100	38	62	83	44	56	93
Government				49	51	17	68	32	7

of women in Cape Town into industrial employment. Even in 1904, women made up 8% of the tiny industrial labour force in the Cape Colony. There was a great increase in the number of women workers in Cape Town (especially black women) during World War I. In 1916/7, 3 200 of the 4 500 women workers in the Cape Peninsula were black. Over the next two decades, the number of women workers rose to 13 200. Just under half of these were white. There was a rapid growth in the number of white women workers in South African industry after 1925. In both Cape Town and the rest of the country, the employment of white women grew at an average rate of 10% per annum from 1925 to 1938.

Table 2.4: Percentage of Women Workers in the Industrial Labour Force

Year	Cape Peninsula		S. Transvaal		Union <u>excluding</u> C.P.	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1916/17	4 500	21	1 200	4	6 700	7
1919/20	6 200	20	2 400	4	8 300	6
1924/25	6 400	18	2 800	4	9 000	6
1932/33	11 000	28	9 500	10	15 200	10
1937/38	13 200	24	12 500	8	25 300	9

Black women were slow to move into industry in the rest of South Africa. In the whole country in 1938, white women in industry outnumbered their black counterparts in a ratio of 6:1. In Cape Town there was a slow, if uneven, growth in the number of black women workers between 1925 and 1938. At the end of the period, black women still just outnumbered white. Cape Town was the first centre in which black women were employed in industry on a significant scale.

Table 2.5: Racial Composition of Female Industrial Labour Force

<u>CAPE PENINSULA</u>	1916/17	1924/25	1937/38
White women	1 300	1 800	6 300
Black women	3 200	4 500	6 900
Total	4 500	6 400	13 200
<hr/>			
<u>UNION EXCLUDING CAPE PENINSULA</u>	1916/17	1924/25	1937/38
White Women	3 800	6 200	21 600
Black Women	3 000	2 900	3 600
Total	6 800	9 100	25 200
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Note: Due to rounding, the totals may differ from the sum of the figures above them.

Table 2.6 gives an impression of the pattern of women's work in Cape Town industry. The actual jobs women did, their places in the division of labour, do not emerge from the statistics. Jobs included putting heads on matches, cigarette making, bookbinding, shoemaking, soap and candle making, in addition to the more obvious tasks of sewing, tailoring, jam and sweet making, and food canning.

Table 2.6: Women's Work in Certain Industrial Sectors of the Cape Peninsula

	1916/17				1924/25				1937/38			
	No.	%W/S	SD	%WW/S	No.	%W/S	SD	%WW/S	No.	%W/S	SD	%WW/S
Food & Drink	1 750	35	39	24	3 010	40	47	21	3 480	38	26	40
Clothing & Textiles	1 290	51	29	43	1 640	53	26	35	6 320	69	47	48
Books & Printing	560	28	12	29	870	32	14	38	1 420	33	11	51
Chemicals	260	43	6	21	260	13	4	36	460	18	4	54
Leather	90	7	2	43	210	14	3	42	720	28	5	62
Other	560	7	12	19	380	2	6	27	780	1	7	43
All Sectors	4 500	21	100	30	6 370	18	100	29	13 230	24	100	48

%W/S Percentage of the labour force in each sector made up by women.

SD Percentage of the female labour force in each sector.

%WW/S Percentage of women workers in each sector who are white.

Note: Due to rounding, the figures for total employment over all sectors reflected in the bottom row may differ from the sum of the figures above them.

## 2 Mustering the Manufacturers 1900 - 1925

The greatest obstacle in the way of the pioneers of manufacturing industry in Cape Town was competition from imports. There was a desperate need for some form of protection. In the Cape Colony, commercial interests exercised a greater power in politics and in business than manufacturing interests.<sup>5</sup> The weak efforts of the latter to secure protective tariffs against imports, their struggles to promote 'colonial manufactures' in the domestic market, met only with hostility from the great importers, the 'merchant princes' of the Cape. The attitudes of commerce ruled. This was because they were also shared by the powerful Cape representatives of the mining and finance capital operating in the north.

Despite the advances made by manufacturing industry in Cape Town during the First World War, the manufacturers as a group remained economically weak and politically impotent. This was the situation right up to 1925 when the first meaningful protective tariffs came into force. The importance of the local employers' organizations, such as the Cape Chamber of Industries, did not lie in their marshalling the manufacturers of the Cape into an army which finally battered down resistance to industrial protection. (It is in this light that their achievements are seen by their own historians and propagandists.) The Cape regiment, however well drilled, had no weapons and was surprised by those whom it thought allies of the enemy being the initiators of a serious protective policy for South African industry.<sup>6</sup> The real importance of the employers' associations lay in their uniting the manufacturers of Cape Town in industrial and regional organizations which helped them to make the most of existing circumstances, most of which lay beyond their control or influence. In this more mundane activity the Cape Chamber of Industries, its predecessors and affiliates, achieved notable success. This will be seen most clearly in their relationship to organized labour, over which

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5. S.A. Commerce & Manufacturers' Record August 1907; S.A. Industry & Trade May 1957, pp.129 et seq., 'Industry's Early Struggle - The Battle for Protection'.

6. cf. Bozzoli (1975, p.213).

they came to exert a powerful and, in some cases, decisive influence after 1925. The employers' organizations in Cape Town in the first quarter of this century successfully adapted themselves to the position of weakness into which they were thrust by economic and political conditions.

The South African Manufacturers' Association (SAMA)<sup>7</sup> was formed by a small group of Cape Town factory owners in 1904.<sup>8</sup> The activities of the Association over the next twenty years centred on three areas: agitation for protective tariffs; the promotion of 'colonial industries'; and the local organization of manufacturers.

## 2a The Battle for Protection

Although formed in 1904, the SAMA took several years to establish itself as the voice of Cape Town factory owners.<sup>9</sup> A journal noted in 1907 that,

...the time, capital and energies (of the manufacturers) have been devoted to keeping their concerns from disaster and they have had little inclination for public affairs. It is little wonder, therefore, that when they did raise their voices on behalf of the cause of their industries, they were quickly silenced and put down by the advocates of free trade.<sup>10</sup>

The SAMA's effective existence dates from 1907 when W.J. Laite became interested in the struggle for protection and found in the Association a vehicle for his ambitions.

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7. The South African Manufacturers' Association (SAMA) changed its name on two occasions. Its membership was at all times largely confined to Cape Town. From 1904 to 1914 it went under the name of SAMA; in 1914 it became the Cape Province Manufacturers' Association (CPMA) and in 1922 it was renamed the Cape Chamber of Industries, which it remains today.
  8. SAMA Minutes: 7 November 1904 (CCI Archives C1/1).
  9. SAMA had 50 members at its first general meeting in 1904; 70 in 1907, and claimed between 300 and 400 in 1909 after a massive membership drive. Many of the new members failed to pay their annual subscription and it appears that membership had stabilised at about 85 by 1911. (SAMA Minutes: 28 November 1904; 29 November 1907 (AGM); 6 April 1909; 25 May 1909; 6 September 1911 - C1/1).
  10. South African Commerce and Manufacturers' Record August 1907 (in future referenced as S.A.Commerce - see bibliography for name changes).

W.J. Laite arrived in South Africa in 1901 at the age of 38. He was a key figure in the campaign for protection and a pioneer of employer organization in South Africa. He sergeant-majored the Cape manufacturers into a united front and was a principal mover behind the formation of the SA Federated Chambers of Industries in 1917 - this being the first nation-wide body. After a period as secretary of the SAFCI, he returned to Cape Town and served as secretary of the Cape Chamber of Industries, the Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers' Association and others until his retirement in 1938. As will be seen, he occupies an important place also in the labour history of Cape Town.

Laite qualified as a printer in England after a seven year apprenticeship and then was the proprietor of several unsuccessful printing ventures.<sup>11</sup> As a printer's traveller he supplied stationery to Buffalo Bill when he visited London with his 'Wild West Show' in 1887. Later he established a 'liberal paper', 'The Hastings and St Leonards Weekly Mail', and was elected a borough councillor. Ill-health forced him to move to a warmer climate. In South Africa Laite started out as the agent of a London firm selling supplies to printers. This business went under in the depression following the Boer War. In his travels around South Africa, Laite came to the realisation that there were "powerful overseas interests holding the economic life of the country in thrall" (Laite, 1943, p.35) and that a "merchant prince class" gained by defending free trade. Laite became the most passionate and dedicated advocate of protection for industry. He decided to

...publish my own magazine as a propagandist medium  
for the cause I had come to believe in. (Laite, 1943, p.35)

In May 1907, South African Commerce and Manufacturers' Record made its appearance. Its aim was to promote the idea of "industrial development by protection to provide South Africa with a sound economic basis" (Laite, 1943, p.36). The journal now began to

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11. These details are drawn from the biography of W.J. Laite written by his son, H.J. Laite (Laite, 1943).



trumpet a challenge to the powerful mining and trading interests. But as yet the motley band of Cape jam, candle and cabinet makers could not mount even a show of force. Articles were printed to keep up spirits presenting the manufacturers as pioneers and stressing that the future prosperity of the country lay in their hands.

Laite had been allowed to describe his journal as the official organ of the SAMA and he was elected an honorary member. In 1908 he became the honorary secretary of the SAMA and in 1909 he was appointed the paid secretary at a monthly salary of £20.<sup>12</sup> He launched an immediate drive for increased membership and called on manufacturers everywhere to organize. Despite its name, the SAMA was always a Cape organization. Laite saw that the campaign for protection would need the support of the manufacturers in the other colonies, especially the Transvaal.

One strong, well-organized association, supported by every manufacturer in the country, would wield a tremendous power and could insist on having their interests adequately considered and justice done to them. Indeed such an organization would wield a power that no Government, however strong, could afford to trifle with.<sup>13</sup>

In 1908 Laite set off on a tour of industrial centres "preaching the gospel of organization and development" (Laite, 1943, pp.37; 48). Manufacturers' associations were established in the Transvaal and Natal and in the Eastern Cape but conflicts of interest over railway rates and the customs union prevented their amalgamation. National co-ordination of demands for protection was partly achieved by the South African National Union, a pressure group formed in 1907 which was influenced by wealthy farmers who sought agricultural protection and expected to benefit also from protection for industry.<sup>14</sup>

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12. SAMA Minutes: 12 February 1907; 29 November 1907 (AGM); 1 October 1908; 27 October 1909 - C1/1.

13. SAMA Minutes: 9 October 1908 - C1/1. The quotation is an extract from 'An Open Letter To The Manufacturers Of South Africa', dated 19 October 1909, a draft of which was discussed at the meeting and accepted after the words "The powerful importing and mining interests" had been deleted and replaced with "Our free trade friends".

14. See S.A. Commerce September 1909, p.342; South African Journal of Industries 1919, p.147; Bozzoli (1981, pp.111; 149; 313n).

In 1910 the Union Government appointed the Cullinan Commission to report on customs tariffs and industries. Laite accompanied the Commission on its tour round the country as the adviser of Mr. Mossop, the one Cape manufacturer who was appointed a member. Laite was appalled by the "bitter opposition of the Chamber of Mines" to protection. On his return he called an urgent meeting to discuss "combined and rapid action" to combat the propaganda of the mining community.<sup>15</sup> Laite,

...assured the meeting that the Mining and Mercantile communities (so far as the latter were affected) would not hesitate to spend very large sums of money in pursuit of their object - opposing the recommendations of the Manufacturers' Association.

A self-elected "Consumers' Committee" had been formed and had put out a booklet on the tariff problem. This was described as,

...a tissue of misrepresentations and served to show the lengths to which the mining interests were prepared to go against the manufacturers whom they recognised as an association with strength.

Laite urged the preparation of a reply which should also be issued in Dutch as part of a campaign "to bind the farmers to stand with the manufacturers".<sup>16</sup> A £2 000 fund was launched to start a 'General Tariff Campaign'.

The Cullinan Commission produced a report that did not recommend any decisive change in tariff policy. Laite commented that the report had been,

...framed on the prejudices and personal bias of the members rather than on the weight of evidence submitted to the Commission...(T)he industrial community realised the utter futility of expecting a proper appreciation of its needs at the hands of men whose position, training and interests necessarily influence their judgement when dealing with economic problems. (Laite, 1913, pp.5-6).

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15. SAMA Minutes: 30 August 1911; 6 September 1911 - C1/1.  
Only 18 out of 85 manufacturers invited attended the meeting.

16. SAMA Minutes: 6 September 1911 - C1/1.

The 1912 SAMA congress decided to use the tariff campaign fund to send Laite overseas to study tariff systems. He visited America and Canada and produced a most impressive report - "The Union Tariff And its Relation to Industrial and Agricultural Development: The Case for Manufacturers" (Laite, 1913). This included a survey of the effects of tariff policies in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, a well-argued case for protection in South Africa and comprehensive recommendations on tariff levels. It "formed the basis for all subsequent agitation and representation" for protection. (Laite, 1943, p.49)

The government still ignored the manufacturers' cries for assistance but their position was vastly improved by the First World War which restricted imports and led to an improvement in their competitive position. Contrary to all expectations, the boom continued after the War. It was only in 1920 that depression concentrated minds on the tariff question once more.

Laite had continued his early efforts to unite the regional manufacturers' associations. In 1914 the SAMA entered into a federation with the Natal association and changed its name to the Cape Province Manufacturers Association (CPMA). Conflicts of interest between the inland and coastal manufacturers prevented wider unity until 1917, when a founding conference was held for the SA Federated Chambers of Industries. Laite left Cape Town to take up the secretaryship of this new body (leaving his son, H.J. Laite, as secretary of the CPMA).

With the formation of the SAFCI, the locus of the manufacturers' struggle for protection shifted north. The CPMA faced the most rabid free traders in its base area and stood no chance of winning them away from the most extreme free trade principles.<sup>17</sup> J.W. Jagger, the leading Cape merchant and the most committed defender of free trade, bought into the furniture and leather industries in 1921 but still fiercely opposed protection.<sup>18</sup> The balance of power between these two fractions of the bourgeoisie in Cape Town was the secure possession of commercial and comprador

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17. Commerce in the north was a lot more tolerant of 'compromises' on protective tariffs. Differences along these lines between the Northern and Southern sections of the Association of Chambers of Commerce are referred to by Kaplan (1976, p.80).

18. Industrial South Africa December 1921, p.534.

elements right up to 1925. The Cape manufacturers might have formulated the arguments for protection but they relied absolutely on the power of others to put this policy into effect.<sup>19</sup>

The protective policies launched by the Pact government in 1925 were a direct result of political battles fought and won in the north. It was the victory of national capital over imperial capital<sup>20</sup> that led to protection and not "agitation and representations" of manufacturers (whether in the Cape or elsewhere). Manufacturing capital then was a small and politically confused element of national capital. It is ironic (but not remarkable) that the SAFCI as a whole stood solidly behind Smuts' South African Party in the 1924 elections (as it had in 1921 and despite the SAP having a shameful record of reneging on promises to bring in tariff protection).<sup>21</sup> In party politics the manufacturers' associations played for the wrong side, vainly hoping it would score an 'own goal'.

## 2b The Promotion of South African Industries

The second area of concern to the Cape Manufacturers' Association was the promotion of existing industries. Merchant capital put severe constraints on the expansion of industry by its ability to sell imported goods more cheaply than they could be made in South Africa. But not only did merchant capital oppose the removal of these constraints through the application of protective tariffs - it opposed all aid to industry<sup>22</sup> and operated in ways which further undermined local production.

For example, the small trading stores in the interior relied on coastal import wholesaling houses for credit and a wide range of their supplies. They were effectively tied to the wholesaler, who could cut credit and supplies if a store began to buy locally produced goods in place of imports. Local industry was unable

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19. Bozzoli (1981, p.157) makes the point that: "In the end it was the local [South African - M.N.] bourgeoisie's two least amenable allies - agricultural capital, and white labour - who were the instruments of the entrenchment of its first requirement: protection."

20. See Kaplan (1977, Chapters 2 and 4); Davies (1977, Chapters 4 and 5). cf. Bozzoli (1981, p.172).

21. S.A. Commerce February 1921, pp.107-8; December 1922, p.611; July 1923, p.329.

22. S.A. Commerce November 1907, p.452, "The Outlook of Mr. Jagger".

to meet all the needs of the stores so by these means the merchants exerted control over many markets.<sup>23</sup> In addition "anti-colonial attitudes" were fostered in the advertising of imported goods. This led to what Laite described as "a deep and unreasoning prejudice of our own people against the products and manufactures of South Africa" (Laite, 1943, p.38). There is one reference to coal from the first colliery in Natal being turned down by the railways in preference for the imported article!<sup>24</sup>

The Cape manufacturers' association saw it as a main object to break down consumer resistance to colonial products.<sup>25</sup> It was acknowledged that this resistance was not unreasoning in all cases.<sup>26</sup> Many colonial manufactures were of an inferior quality. It was obvious that,

...the manufacturers would have to put the very best article on the market and put it up in the very best manner, otherwise they would not be able to fight down foreign competition.<sup>27</sup>

South African Commerce continually gave hints on how factory efficiency could be improved and how marketing should be tackled. The manufacturers' association organized an exhibition of manufactured goods in an effort both to interest buyers and encourage improvements in quality.<sup>28</sup>

In 1907 the SAMA gave its support to the formation of the SA National Alliance,<sup>29</sup> which encouraged patriotic interest in all South African products. It combined the interests of "farmers, politicians, manufacturers and commercial men" (Bozzoli, 1981, p.111). Its associated wing, the SA National Union, also promoted South African manufactured goods and agricultural produce overseas.<sup>30</sup>

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23. SA Journal of Industries 1921, p.118, "The Industrial Development of SA".

24. Ibid., p.120.

25. S.A. Commerce September 1907, p.300.

26. S.A. Commerce June 1907, p.76.

27. S.A. Commerce August 1907, p.250.

28. SAMA Minutes: 2 July 1908 - C1/1; "Official Souvenir of the SA Industrial Exhibition" supplement to S.A. Commerce February, 1914.

29. SAMA Minutes: 21 October 1907 - C1/1.

30. S.A. Commerce June 1909, p.128; see also footnote 14.

The Cape manufacturers' association gave practical assistance to manufacturers to help them cope with the realities of competition from imports and the marketing networks of wholesalers.

## 2c Organization

The few histories which have commented on the early associations of factory-owners in South Africa see their main significance in leading or supporting the battle for protective tariffs. My contention has been that these associations had little effective role in the 'victory' of protection. Their weather-beaten banners were flown on every battlefield for twenty years, but they never contributed any fighting forces and their bishops often blessed the wrong side. Protectionist propaganda was a major pastime of the CPMA and their most publicised activity. But the true significance of manufacturers' associations before 1925 lies elsewhere - in the gradual organization of the struggling, competing, bickering owners of small factories into bodies in which they could co-operate for their immediate mutual benefit. Such organization was initially a by-product of the perceived need to unite all in the crusade for protection. It came to be their real reason for existence.<sup>31</sup>

One of the SAMA's original aims was to watch over "legislation of importance to industry".<sup>32</sup> It regularly made submissions to government commissions of enquiry and parliamentary select committees on all matters from customs tariffs and railway rates to factory conditions, hours of work, workmen's compensation, apprenticeship, sweating and wage and conciliation boards. It sent deputations to the government on a wide range of concerns. These pleas and recommendations may often have been disregarded, but

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31. Bozzoli (1981, Chapter 3 especially) provides a useful analysis of the ideological functions of the manufacturers' associations before 1925, but she virtually ignores the practical and parochial aspect of their importance. Bozzoli's concept of "national capital" (p.171), does not allow scope for stressing the regional determinants of class struggle. Like the Poulantzian writers, her work appears to seek a single 'aggregated' process of class formation in South Africa. Unlike the Poulantzians, a great deal of her attention is focussed on the Cape because it was there that the "ideologists" of manufacturing capital first emerged. However the relationship of these ideologists of the "national bourgeoisie" to the class struggle in Cape Town is not raised by Bozzoli.

32. SAMA Minutes: 24 November 1904 - C1/1.

in the process of debating and formulating opinions on these matters, manufacturers came to see more clearly their common interests. They found practical uses for organization which extended beyond the limited (and largely unattainable) objectives of their Association.

In a situation in which all manufacturers faced unpredictable competition from imports, it was sometimes possible for agreement to be reached on various aspects of business practice in order to limit cut-throat competition between local manufacturers. This was more likely in industries in which different labour processes co-existed (for example, leather and clothing). The 'larger' factories, which were more likely to belong to the Association, could agree on certain standards between themselves in competition against the sweaters and 'rat-shops'. Manufacturers had to be able to respond to changes in market conditions and in the absence of pressure from labour there was no point in setting minimum wage levels. Agreements were thus around hours of work, holiday breaks and sharing the supply of skilled workers. It was only at times of labour unrest that manufacturers would all stand to gain by together negotiating a minimum wage with the workers.

A new phase in the history of the CPMA began during the First World War. Former ad hoc subcommittees which had met occasionally to deal with problems specific to one branch of industry became more permanent "Trade Sections". The building contractors already had a Master Builders' Association by 1907<sup>33</sup> but few of the other industries were so organized. Several Trade Sections were formed directly as the result of strikes (as with the cabinet makers and clothing manufacturers)<sup>34</sup> but all were a response to the "unrest in labour circles" which marked the years from 1917 to 1920.

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33. SAMA Minutes: 27 September 1907 - C1/1.

34. CPMA Minutes: 20 February 1918 - C1/1. Some of the other Trade Sections were in the sheet metal, confectionery, milling, tanning and leather and baking trades (CPMA Minutes: 4 February 1919 - Advisory Committee on the Factory Act; 6 March 1919 - C1/1).

SA Commerce warned that:

Unorganized capital is at the mercy of organized labour  
but organized capital is respected by organized labour.<sup>35</sup>

Trade Sections were given an added fillip by the emergence of "conciliation boards", in which employers negotiated with union representatives. These were unofficial, in the sense of not being sanctioned by law, although in several cases their chairmen were nominated by the Minister of Mines and Industries.<sup>36</sup> A commentator drew this lesson from one of the strikes,

...Conciliation Boards are proved a necessity, since they may be the means of preventing strikes. In addition, these institutions may succeed in securing better terms for the workers, besides creating confidence on both sides...it is evident that when Masters and Men face one another across a table, both arrive speedily at a better appreciation of their difficulties, desires and aspirations, than is possible by other means. Greater knowledge of the conditions facing employers is needed by the workers, whilst employers should of necessity get a closer view-point upon the aspirations of their employees.<sup>37</sup>

Once the immediate crisis had passed, the Trade Sections found further areas for co-operation. Let us take the Clothing Section as an example:

The clothing industry in Cape Town only developed a significant factory basis during the First World War. It was only after the "Tailors Strike" of 1917 that sufficient clothing manufacturers joined the CPMA to make a Trade Section feasible. This strike was settled by the Mayor and no conciliation board was formed in this case as the garment workers were insufficiently organized.

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35. S.A. Commerce February 1918, p.18.

36. In the 1917 cabinet and bakers disputes. S.A. Commerce January 1918, p.18; SA Journal of Industries 1918, p.472.

37. S.A. Commerce December 1917, p.530.



But eight of the fifteen large clothing factories joined the Clothing Section which met regularly until 1920 and then sporadically until 1925.

It is interesting that the Section was not united in its demands for higher tariffs on imported clothing. One of its principal members, Mr. M. Bertish, owned and managed a wholesale bespoke factory which was a branch of his factory in Bristol. He imported large quantities of clothes for sale in South Africa and stood to lose if tariffs were raised. Bertish did not oppose tariff protection in meetings but made it plain where his interests lay.<sup>38</sup> All were united in condemning the flood of second-hand clothes that poured into South Africa from 1919 to 1921.<sup>39</sup>

The Clothing Section was of service to the manufacturers in the following instances:

- 1) In 1919 all members agreed to reduce working hours. The resolution read:  
  
'In view of the fact that there is a movement of foot [sic] for shorter working hours per week, this meeting of Clothing Manufacturers considers it will be in the interests of the industry to take united action by reducing the hours of labour to from 8 am to 5.30 pm daily, the new hours to come into operation on and from Monday 10 March'.<sup>40</sup>
- 2) Clothing manufacturers consulted with one another on how to give effect to the 1918 Factories Act. This required them to keep a register of outworkers and to sew a label onto completed items stating that they had not been produced in a factory.<sup>41</sup>
- 3) All agreed to pay workers for the Peace Holidays in 1919. Common decisions were taken on the duration of the Christmas break in 1919, 1920 and 1921 and on what payments should

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38. Clothing Section Minutes: 28 January 1919 - C1/1.

39. CPMA Minutes: 27 August 1919 (AGM) - C1/1; Clothing Section Minutes: 26 April 1920 - M1/1.

40. Clothing Section Minutes: 3 March 1919 - C1/1. Clothing workers presented a petition for shorter hours shortly after similar demands had been made by shop employees (Clothing Section Minutes: 28 January 1919 - C1/1).

41. CPMA Minutes: 27-28 January 1919 and 4 February 1919 (Advisory Committee on the Factory Act) - C1/1.

be made over this period. Holiday pay was rejected in favour of granting a bonus "if deemed...to be desirable".<sup>42</sup>

- 4) In the post-War boom there was a scarcity of trained machinists. Employers found that good workers left because of the higher wages on offer elsewhere. One manufacturer suggested that steps be taken,

...to obviate the unfairness to members of the industry which was caused by them losing labour which had been trained and made efficient.<sup>43</sup>

The Section agreed that applicants for jobs would be asked why they had left their previous employer before being taken on. Non-members of the CPMA were also asked to co-operate. Concern was expressed that present conditions would lead "to undue increasing of wages".<sup>44</sup>

- 5) During the War, clothing factories had expanded greatly as a result of government contracts for military uniforms. Contracts were awarded by tender, usually to the lowest bidder, and the 'better' factory owners often found that they were being underbid by sweaters, or that contracts were placed overseas. They "respectfully requested" that the government make a list of approved tenderers who would be awarded contracts in preference to overseas factories.<sup>45</sup> The government refused to favour local manufactureres in this way and dissatisfaction with tendering policy is a recurring theme in the minutes of Clothing Section meetings. In 1923, all paid for Middlemass to go to Pretoria for discussions on tendering.<sup>46</sup>

In 1925 the Pact govenment's new industrial and labour policy required the urgent formation of an employers' association for the Cape clothing industry which was registered under the Industrial

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42. Clothing Section Minutes: 19 November 1919 - C1/1; 9 December 1920 - M1/1; 5 December 1921 - M1/1.

43. Clothing Section Minutes: 2 September 1919 - C1/1.

44. Ibid.

45. Clothing Section Minutes: 7 July 1918 - C1/1; 18 June 1923 - M1/1.

46. Clothing Section Minutes: 18 June 1923 - M1/1.

Conciliation Act. The Clothing Section of the Cape Chamber of Industries<sup>47</sup> was able to respond immediately and decisively. The minutes of its final meeting ended as follows:

'Resolved: that the meeting form itself into the Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers Association'.<sup>48</sup>

In other industries, too, the Trade Sections of the CCI laid a firm basis for the more cohesive, newly-registered employers' associations which defended and advanced the interests of Cape manufacturers after the Pact government came to power.

### 3 The Fits and Starts of Worker Organization, 1900 - 1925

By 1925 the most significant factory owners in Cape Town had been organized by the Cape Chamber of Industries (CCI). This body had proved itself of considerable practical service to the manufacturers. It provided a forum in which they could meet to agree on some standards for 'fair' competition between themselves; it supervised collective appeals to the government on import duties, railway rates and legislation which affected them; it assisted them in dealing with trade unions and labour unrest. The CCI had very limited power in merchant capital - dominated Cape Town and still less nationally. But it adapted itself successfully to its position of weakness and stretched what influence it had to its limits. The CCI and its sub-units were poised to meet the threats and challenges which accompanied the Pact government.

By comparison, the organization of labour in Cape Town before 1925 was a failure. Several craft unions gave a measure of protection to their restricted membership and a host of unions existed in the minds of honorary officials but there was nothing which deserved the name of a 'labour movement' in Cape Town. The local trade union co-ordinating body, the Cape Federation of Labour Unions (CFLU), was struggling for existence in the face of worker apathy and employer disinterest. Ironically, it was saved from extinction by the Industrial Conciliation Act.

The labour organizations which existed in Cape Town in the

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47. The Cape Province Manufacturers' Association changed its name to the Cape Chamber of Industries in 1922.

48. Clothing Section Minutes: 24 August 1925 - M1/1.

first two decades of this century were typically craft unions. Small, weak and hesitant; collapsing and being revived in phase with the trade cycle; they reflected the narrow and shaky base of Cape Town manufacturing industry. Some unions, such as the Printers, Engineers and Carpenters, survived the whole period, but many more sprang to life only to disappear within a few years or even months. At least five unions of clothing workers flashed on and off the scene between 1900 and 1925.<sup>49</sup> The small, scattered workshops and few factories, together with the pressures of intense competition between workers, made organization particularly difficult.

The first unions were formed amongst the white craftsmen, many of whom were immigrants and had experience of unionism in Britain. A notable feature of these early craft unions is their non-racial character. Although there was certainly prejudice against malay and coloured artisans on the part of some whites, the latter often found it imperative to include all skilled workers in their unions for fear of being undercut.<sup>50</sup> One of the principles of the CFLU was "no discrimination on the basis of colour" (Stuart, 1950c). Cape unionists regularly refused to attend national con-

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49. The United South African Tailors' Union (SA News 3 April 1901); The Amalgamated Society of Tailors (A6-1906, p.144); The Tailors' and Tailoress' Union (1917-1919); The Middlemen Tailors' Union 1919-20 (Cost of Living Commission 1916-1920, Central Archives Depot K17, Correspondence 26 [127] ); Cape Peninsula Tailors' Union (1921) (Gitsham and Trembath, 1926, p.110).

50. Before the 1920's the APO and Dr. Abdurahman appear to have encouraged "coloured" workers to leave 'mixed' unions and form their own. They could then undercut the whites and would be assured of regular work. (See Simons and Simons, 1969, pp.226-7). In the 1930's there was a concerted effort by certain political groupings to get all 'coloured' workers to boycott the 'white-dominated' Cape Federation. The argument was that 'coloureds' would only get work if their wages were lower than whites. Coloured workers would only suffer unemployment if they supported the efforts of the unions to raise wages, for whites would step into these jobs. This had been an obvious effect of the higher wage standards introduced under the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts (The Sun 4 October 1935). The Sun carried several articles and letters on this debate. Some suggested that the boycotters had political motives behind their naive views - a separate 'coloured' union movement could be useful to them. (The Sun 13 December 1935).

ferences which prohibited the attendance of black delegates.<sup>51</sup> The racial exclusiveness of northern unions was one of the main arguments of the Cape against joining a national trade union co-ordinating body (Williams, 1974). In less skilled work it proved impossible to organize white and coloured into the same organizations. The coloured workers in building (bricklaying) and tailoring, for example, owed their employment to their lower rates of pay. The "Bricklayers' Union No. 2" was formed to accomodate coloured bricklayers in the hope of slowly raising their wages up to the level of the whites. This was not achieved until after 1924 when all building workers could join a single industrial union.<sup>52</sup> Attempts to incorporate Malay tailors into the various clothing workers unions were continually unsuccessful. They remained unorganized and intensely exploited.

Before the CFLU came on the scene, the 'labour movement', such as it was, concerned itself with largely futile attempts to promote the election of "labour representatives" to the legislature and municipality. A Cape Town District Trades and Labour Council was formed in 1899 (Ticktin, 1973, p.313). The Council did not concern itself much with the organization of workers into trade unions (Stuart, 1950c). Many unionists were members of the Cape Town Social Democratic Federation which was founded in 1904.<sup>53</sup> It was a forum for heated political debate and the propagation of socialist ideas.

1913 saw the formation of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions.

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51. The CFLU was asked to send delegates to the 1919 'National Conference of Employers and Employees'. Mr. Batty of the Federation stated: "The Federation would not send a single delegate unless they had an understanding that coloured delegates would be admitted...'It is as likely as not that for this conference we should elect white workers to represent the coloured as is usually done. We have a majority of coloured men in the Federation but they generally appoint white men as their representatives. On this occasion they might still follow the usual procedure, but that is not the point. We desire to have a recognition of the principle settled once and for all...' " (CPMA Minutes: 3 September 1919 - C1/1).
  52. The Western Province Building, Electrical and Allied Trade Union; Stuart (1950h).
  53. Ticktin (1973, p.323). Simons and Simons (1969) give the year 1902.

The Cape Federation was largely the creation of one man - Robert Stuart. Just as W.J. Laite cajoled and bullied the manufacturers of Cape Town into their organization, Bob Stuart built a co-ordinating body for labour. In so doing, he became the dominant figure in Cape unionism for forty years.

Stuart was born in 1870, as were Lenin, Bill Andrews and Jan Smuts.<sup>54</sup> He had little formal schooling and began work at an early age. At 14 he was apprenticed as a monumental mason and practised this trade in Canada and the United States before emigrating to South Africa in 1901. Stuart soon became honorary secretary of the local branch of the National Union of Operative Stone Masons. He claimed to be a founder member of the SDF, but to have withdrawn after a clash with "young Communists" who flooded the SDF after 1905. Stuart held "views of a practical character as against the Revolutionary theory of Marxism" and "determined to devote himself to solving the economic problems of the workers through organization into the trade unions".<sup>55</sup> By Stuart's own account, he and some friends formed the CFLU in response to a press report that the Transvaal-based South African Industrial Federation intended to send a delegation to Cape Town to establish a local branch. Stuart saw the need for,

...a Federation in the Cape which would be entirely independent in status, outlook and policy but which would, of course, be willing to consult, and co-operate, with any similar body in South Africa on all matters of national importance and common interest. (Stuart, 1950d)

The Cape Federation was thus not formed to meet a need which arose out of the state of worker organization in Cape Town. It had to create a rôle for itself.

Stuart was first honorary treasurer of the CFLU. In 1915

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54. Most of the following is drawn from Stuart's hilarious autobiography, "I Look Back", published serially in the Trade Union Bulletin in 1950 and 1951 - Stuart (1950a-k; 1951a,b).

55. Trade Union Bulletin October 1941, p.26 - "Men Who Matter: No.1 - A Dour Scotsman. Robert C. Stuart" (by H.A. Evans).

he became the full-time secretary, a post which he held until 1941. From this position he successfully and treacherously torpedoed every attempt to unite the South African trade union movement under a single co-ordinating body.<sup>56</sup> Stuart's Federation was conservative, reformist and Cape chauvinist. For the first ten years of its existence it was apparently weak and largely inconsequential. Most of the local craft unions affiliated to the Federation and odd new unions were formed, but there was a chronic lack of funds. Stuart was engaged as secretary at a wage equal to what he earned as a mason but for the first two years of his appointment there were no funds to pay him.<sup>57</sup>

The boom conditions which developed in the economy towards the end of the First World War provided an unprecedented opportunity for organization. Worker militancy was spurred on by the victory of the Russian Revolutions and by the example of worker struggles in Europe and the United States following the War.<sup>58</sup> Cape Town workers raised wage demands in the face of post-War inflation. They demanded the recognition of new unions and the right to call in the Federation to assist in negotiations.<sup>59</sup> Disputes and strikes occurred in every branch of industry and on the docks, where Clements Kadalie was organizing the ICU. Demonstrations and strikes were held to stop the export of food while its price was so high. Industrial South Africa reported an "increasing enthusiasm" for organization in Cape Town and noted,

...there is an uneasy undercurrent of unrest, which is spreading more every day.<sup>60</sup>

Similar militancy was seen in the Transvaal which included black workers as well as white. Natal was horrified by a "workers' soviet", supported by dissatisfied policemen, ousting the city council and occupying the Town Hall.<sup>61</sup>

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56. See Williams (1974).

57. How did Stuart survive? He may have been paid small sums by the unions for which he acted as secretary. This was the case in the early 1920's. Stuart was the secretary of the Bakers' Union from 1911 (till 1950!).

58. S.A. Commerce February 1918, p.62.

59. Industrial South Africa August 1919, p.423. (Formerly S.A. Commerce...)

60. Industrial South Africa January 1920, p.34.

61. Industrial SA February 1920, pp.67, 87; also see R.K. Cope Comrade Bill.

The tidal wave of post-War organization reached its climax on May Day 1920, which was celebrated nationally for the first time in South Africa.<sup>62</sup> A mass meeting of workers on the Parade in Cape Town pledged themselves

'...to prepare by organisations of industries to be in a position to carry on production and distribution in the time of capitalist dissolution, through the DICTATORSHIP of the Working Class into the Co-operative Commonwealth.'<sup>63</sup>

The 1920 congress of the CFLU passed resolutions in favour of industrial as opposed to craft unionism and "closed with lusty singing of the Red Flag".<sup>64</sup>

But there was nothing behind the new rhetoric of revolution. The congress of the following year was opened by the Mayor of Cape Town and the Minister of Mines and Industries. The Bolshevik (a paper published by 'militants') pointed out that,

...the passing of motions calling for militant action is useless and will only be nullified by craft unions affiliated to the Federation as long as these unions are controlled by reactionary officials....It is up to the militants on the congress...to realize that the main task is the reorganization of the Trades Federation of Labour Unions from a craft basis to an industrial basis, the organization of the workers into industrial unions, built up from the workers' committees capable of leading the masses to action.<sup>65</sup>

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62. Ticktin (1973, p.330) believes that the first May Day gathering held in Cape Town was in 1905.

63. Pamphlet: "Labour Day, 1st May 1920". (Ad2, TUCSA Archives).

64. The Bolshevik May 1920.

65. The Bolshevik April 1921. The report continues: "...The last resolution of course called for the socialisation of the means of production etc (you know the formula). This is usual you know; no Trade Union congress which is self respecting could neglect to utter this benediction on the 'sacred object of the working class' (by sacred they mean, I suppose, that it cannot be touched)..." [Parentheses in the original].



The Federation took advantage of the labour unrest to win credibility with the employers, who were desperate to minimize "to the utmost the possibility of industrial warfare".<sup>66</sup> The Federation was regularly called in by employers faced with a strike or dispute. It eagerly participated in the formation of Conciliation Boards in several strike-torn trades. It made no move towards the industrial unionism being promoted by the 'militants'.

The Conciliation Boards became defunct after the depression began to bite in 1921. Employers' interests moved away from labour and back to tariff protection as unemployment rose, wages fell and workers' organizations crumbled.<sup>67</sup> The Federation was again visited by hard times. Stuart stayed on although there was no money to pay his salary. By 1924, the Federation was in a sorry state. Stuart was owed over £700 - more than a year's salary;<sup>68</sup> unions which had not disappeared were mostly hollow shells, with few activities. As craft unions they were ill-suited for the forms of struggle which came to Cape Town with the growth of secondary industry after 1925.

Bankrupt financially and organizationally, abjuring any mixture of politics with trade unionism, the Federation had no choices open to it when confronted by the new labour laws of the 1920's and the intentions of the employers' associations regarding their implementation. But it did not require any choices - the security offered to unions and union officials was exactly what it desired most.

#### 4 Industrial Legislation

Before 1924, there were three principal laws which affected labour in the Cape - the Regulation of Wages (Specified Trades) Act, No.29 of 1918; the Factories Act, No.28 of 1918; and the Apprenticeship Act, No.26 of 1922.

The Wage Regulation Act was never effective. Its enactment

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66. S.A. Commerce February 1918, p.62.

67. The 1922 Annual Report of the CCI described the labour situation as being "entirely devoid of friction" (p.9 - C2).

68. CFLU: 13th Annual Report, 1925 (GWUSA Archives).

followed the reports of the Parliamentary Select Committee on sweated labour in factories which are referred to in Chapter one. The purpose of the Act was to regulate the wages and conditions "of women and young persons in certain callings where there was evidence of sweating or exploitation".<sup>69</sup> The Act allowed for the establishment of "Wage Boards" in these industries. The Boards were to consist of an equal number of representatives of employers and workers and a neutral chairman. In 1926 a commentator wrote:

The Act had little success. Organization among employees was weak or non-existent, many were too timid to appeal to the Boards, the attempt to fix progressive scales of rates led to untowards results (such as dismissal of those entitled to increases), and the fixing of the adult age at 18 meant either the adoption of a very low minimum or loss of employment when that age was reached owing to the rate being too high.<sup>70</sup>

In 1925, the Economic and Wage Commission reported that the Act had "fallen into desuetude".<sup>71</sup>

The Factories Act, on the other hand, was one of the pillars of South African industrial legislation for sixty-five years. It set minimum standards for the operation of all factories in the country. It regulated the maximum number of hours of work per week. Provisions were made about the use of machinery, the design of factories and precautions to prevent accidents at work.<sup>72</sup> Factories, mainly clothing factories, which gave out work, had to keep a register of the names and addresses of outworkers, the quantity of work given out and the amounts paid out. The premises

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69. Social & Industrial Review March 1926, p.140. 'The New Wage Act in South Africa' being a "reprint" from the International Labour Review of March 1926.

70. Ibid.

71. UG 14-1926, para. 77 of Conclusion.  
Although the tailoring trade was clearly a primary target of the Act, and steps were taken to apply it in the Cape clothing industry (UG 42 - 1920, p.43), I encountered no evidence that it had any effect on the industry. It does not seem either to have been used as an organizational focus by the CFLU.

72. See Budlender (1979, Chapter 5).

of outworkers could be visited by inspectors and if satisfactory, a label could be attached to garments, to indicate they were produced under approved conditions.<sup>73</sup> By 1919, the inspectorate still had "had little time to really find out the true state of affairs" in the clothing industry.<sup>74</sup> The six inspectors were far too few to police all the factories in the entire country.<sup>75</sup> The Act, it seems, only allowed the inspection of outworkers who took in work from 'factories' as defined in the Act. This excluded from regulation both small tailoring shops, with less than three workers, and the outworkers of merchant tailors who did not have indoor workshops.

The Apprenticeship Act of 1922 made provision for the training of youths in skilled jobs. It allowed relatively high educational qualifications to be fixed for apprentices and thus tended to exclude coloureds from being trained as skilled workers, even in areas in which coloured skilled labour had long been important (Marais, 1939, p.262; Leslie, 1929). Trade unions in Cape Town participated in the Juvenile Affairs Boards set up under the Juveniles Act, No.33 of 1921, to assist (effectively white) youths to gain employment and training.

Before 1924, trade unions in Cape Town had no special status by law or tradition. The economic environment of fierce competition between small factories threatened by cheap imports gave little scope for the progress of a trade union movement. In the absence of effective worker organization or worker militancy, employers saw no point in according any real role to the trade unions of the CFLU.. We argue below that the new industrial laws of 1924 and 1925 allowed a function to be created for these trade unions. The laws were the precondition for the growth of a more permanent

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73. Annual Report of the Factories and Labour Division, Department of Mines, 1919 (UG 42 - 1920).

74. Ibid.

75. I found no evidence of these provisions of the Act having any disruptive effect on the clothing industry beyond a tendency noted by the factory inspectors "on the part of merchant tailors to abolish their workshops and to give out work for completion" (ibid). This report does not specify in which towns this tendency was noted.

labour movement in the city. Before analysing the effects of the laws in Cape Town, we need to explain some of the main provisions of the laws. The purpose of much of the narrative in the following chapters will be lost on the reader who does not understand how the laws operated administratively.

The Industrial Conciliation Act, No.11 of 1924, allowed for the legal recognition of trade unions for the first time. A union could apply for "registration" under the Act to an official of the Department of Labour called the "Registrar of Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations". Registration was granted swiftly once the Registrar had approved the union's constitution and provided that there was a good prospect of the union attracting members. Registration tended to be applied for and granted on a regional basis although a union registered to operate in the whole Transvaal might only have members in Johannesburg. A few "national unions" were registered where a single union had branches throughout the country (for example, in printing, leather and furniture). In some industries, the presence of craft unions meant that two or more unions operated in a single industry in the same area. But the craft unions were restricted by their constitutions and registration conditions to organize certain industries only. It was a firm principle of the Registrar not to allow more than one union to be registered for the organization of the same workers. The Registrar always consulted with local officials of the Department of Labour and any existing trade unions and employers' organizations before he agreed to register a new trade union. The registration application of a new union was never rejected only because there already existed a union registered to operate in the same area. For example, an existing union registered to operate in the Western Cape, but having no members in George, might not object to a new union just being registered for this region, and the scope of its own registration being altered accordingly. If the existing union did object, the Department of Labour would try to arrange for the two unions to amalgamate. If this were not possible, the new union might anyway be granted registration if it could show itself to be 'representative' in the area in question. The administration of the aspects of the Act relating to registration thus encouraged regional rather than national unions and made

the secession of a branch of a national union easy. In several instances an existing, registered union was challenged by a new unregistered union operating in the same area. The Registrar would de-register the currently registered union and register the new union only if the latter could prove itself more representative. The criteria of representivity were decided by the Registrar who relied on the information sent to him by the local labour inspectors before he took any action.

Unregistered unions were never illegal, but they were not entitled to participate in the machinery of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Trade unionists soon came to regard registration as the essential condition for building a union. Registration did not ensure recognition from employers automatically but it helped to establish the credibility of a union. The most important advantage of registration was that it allowed unions the possibility of negotiating a schedule of wages and conditions which were legally binding on employers in the industry. For this to occur, employers had to be organized as well. A reasonable proportion of them had to be members of an "employers' association" also registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act, for the same industry and a similar area to the trade union.

Three types of legally binding wage regulations could then result:

Firstly, if requested, the Minister of Labour might appoint a "Conciliation Board". This was composed of equal members of employer and employee representatives. It was established to settle any serious disputes between the union and the employers or to negotiate wages and conditions. The Minister could make any agreement arrived at by the Board legally binding on all employers and employees in the industry and area in question. The Department of Labour was responsible for enforcing the conciliation board agreement. The conciliation board was not a permanent body. It disbanded once it had reached an agreement.

Secondly, the employers' association and the trade union could agree to form an "Industrial Council". The industrial council was a permanent body which negotiated an agreement which the Minister could gazette as legally binding on all employers and workers in the industry in a particular area. Although the regis-

tration of trade unions and employers' organizations was a precondition for the formation of a legally recognized industrial council, it was not a sufficient condition. Once an industrial council was proposed, the Department of Labour often required both union and employer bodies to make changes to their respective constitutions and scrutinised the constitution of the industrial council. A more substantial representivity was required for participation in an industrial council than for registration. In the first years of the Act's operation the Department was not concerned only with the numbers of members on paper but also with how well the workers were organized. It was wary of employers forming paper unions which they would dominate or well-organized skilled workers dominating badly organized unskilled workers. Industrial council agreements were enforced by the paid "Agents" of the council in factories which belonged to the employers' organization and by inspectors of the Department of Labour in non-member factories. The council was financed by weekly levies on union members and their employers. Many industrial council agreements embodied 'closed shop' agreements and allowed for union subscriptions to be collected by the employers after workers had signed a stop-order on their wages. The trade union and employers organization each had the same number of representatives on the industrial council.

Thirdly, if a conciliation board or industrial council failed to reach an agreement, the Minister could appoint one or more arbitrators. The recommendation of the arbitrator could be gazetted and made legally binding.

The most controversial aspect of the Industrial Conciliation Act was the limitation it imposed on the workers' right to strike (and on the ability of employers to institute a 'lock-out').<sup>76</sup>

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76. The other controversial aspect of the Act was its racial exclusivity. All whites, coloureds and asiatics were defined as "employees" for the purposes of the Act, but many African workers were excluded from the definition. As is discussed below, in Cape Town, African workers could be subject to the Act. Consequently, this summary of aspects of the Act omits reference to its 'racial implications'.

Strikes were illegal until a long and complex procedure had been followed (Budlender, 1979, pp.97-102).

The Industrial Conciliation Act was passed while Smuts' South African Party was still in power. It was allowed to operate unchanged by the new Pact government. The Pact government introduced the Wage Act. This became the second element in the legalized wage regulation system which has applied to South African industry ever since.

The Wage Act, No.27 of 1925, was to operate in industries in which workers and employers were insufficiently organized to allow the settlement of wages and conditions under the Industrial Conciliation Act. The Minister appointed a permanent, three member "Wage Board" which, at his request, investigated the conditions of employment in an industry in specified areas, and produced a recommended schedule of wages and conditions for the industry. The Minister could eventually gazette this recommendation as a "Wage Determination" which was legally binding on all employers in the area. The Wage Board held public sittings around the country to hear evidence from employers and employees and their organizations. Its recommendations had to take into account the ability of an industry to pay, but, if possible, should recommend wages which allowed workers a "civilized" standard of living. If the Board did not think an industry could afford to pay 'civilized wages' by virtue of its cost structure or competitive situation, it informed the Minister of this fact and did not present him with a recommendation unless he specifically requested this. The Wage Board operated slowly. After its investigations, it submitted its recommendations to the Minister. These first had to be gazetted to allow interested parties the chance to raise objections and had to be republished for objection if any changes were made by the Board as a result of the objections. The Minister had no power to alter a Wage Board recommendation himself, he could only reject it or refer it back to the Board. Once the objection phase had been completed - this usually involved the Board in writing a commentary on all the objections - the Minister gazetted the recommendations finally as a Wage Determination. The determinations were enforceable by the Department of Labour.

The new laws did not operate smoothly. The Department of Labour had insufficient staff to police the laws or administer them with speed and efficiency. The Department had to work out from scratch all the procedural aspects of the administration of the laws and decide on how the industrial laws ought to operate together. On top of these problems came an unending stream of court cases as employers and their legal advisers sought for (and found) loopholes in the laws and their administration which allowed the avoidance of industrial council agreements and wage determinations. This required amendments to the acts as well as special acts in 1930 and 1934 to validate earlier wage determinations.<sup>77</sup>

##### 5 The Stuart Machine 1925 - 1939

The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 and the Wage Act of 1925 set trade unionism in South Africa on new ground. Archie Crawford addressed a meeting of industrialists in 1923 as follows:

The Rand Revolt has given the workers' movement a great setback and trade unionism is now in the melting-pot again. It is a mistake for employers to adopt the ostrich-like policy and ignore the Unions. This is a time when they can help the Unions to grow up "within the pale". Workers organizations will quickly revive but they will assume new forms and it is vital to industry and to the whole community that the new unionism should be of a character which conduces to the smooth running of industry and the peace and good order of the community. The character of the old unions was such as to make for trouble and disaster.<sup>78</sup>

The laws which followed were tailored to resolve the particular crisis which the state faced as a result of the 1922 Strike.<sup>79</sup> As such, they were the product of class struggle on the Witwatersrand. It is important to see that for the class struggle in Cape

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77. See Budlender (1979, Chapters 3 and 4); Davies (1979, pp.211; 216-7).

78. Industrial SA June 1923, p.276.

79. See Davies (1977, Chapter 5) or Kaplan (1977, pp.77-113).



Town (and everywhere else in South Africa), these laws were an 'external imposition'. Conditions in Cape Town simply did not enter into any set of equations for which the laws were a solution. Historical assessments of the legislation have properly focussed on the genesis<sup>80</sup> or evolution<sup>81</sup> of the laws in the struggles on the Rand. However, these assessments are less satisfactory when they examine the effects of the laws on worker struggles, for they still limit their attention to the Witwatersrand while the laws were applied all over the country.

Davies (1976) and Lever (1977) note five principal effects of the industrial legislation (implicitly) in the context of the trade union movement on the Witwatersrand:

- 1) There was a reduction in the number of strikes;
- 2) New scope was given to the bureaucratisation of unions;
- 3) The exclusion of African workers from the Industrial Conciliation Act confirmed the separation of their struggles from those of white workers.
- 4) In the short term, the Act led to an apathy amongst workers for organization and in some industries a decline in union membership.
- 5) A new relationship of understanding came to exist between union officials and employers, leading to a reduction in labour militancy.

These points are inadequate and misleading when one considers the effects of the laws on the class struggle in Cape Town.

Firstly, the Industrial Conciliation Act did not secure (let alone confirm) a racial separation in working class struggles in Cape Town. Coloureds were included in the Act and so (for a period) were Africans who, in Cape Town, did not have to carry passes. In the Transvaal the primary division in the working class was on racial lines and this was enforced by the Industrial Conciliation Act. In the Cape the Industrial Conciliation Act

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80. Davies (1976).

81. Lever (1977).

opened up the possibility of working class struggles conducted through non-racial trade unions. Trade unions in Cape Town were generally nonracial, but organization did not encompass all workers - it was never (and has never been) extended to the mass of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.<sup>82</sup>

Secondly, the effect of the labour laws in Cape Town was altogether different from the Transvaal. The Industrial Conciliation Act was the product of the defeat of the militant white working class on the Witwatersrand and was followed by fewer strikes, falling membership and chaos in the Transvaal union movement. In Cape Town, on the other hand, (which was free of any strong or militant unions), the Act resulted in a flowering of organization and the rebirth and registration of new trade unions. From 1925 to 1928 the Cape Federation continually reported "the most successful year to date". In 1928 Stuart proudly reported:

For the first time in the history of the Federation we can say that the Federation is solvent.<sup>83</sup>

A new relationship was built up between union officials and employers in Cape Town but it differed from that seen in the Transvaal. New unions were formed and recognised by the employers directly as a result of the Industrial Conciliation Act and the Wage Act. There were no militant struggles for union recognition; there was no need for Cape employers to encourage local unions to grow up "within the pale"; it was years still before industrial expansion had created a material basis for the existence of a solid union movement.

The legislation created a more favourable climate for organization than had ever existed in Cape Town. Stuart wrote in his

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82. It may appear controversial to assert that semi-skilled and unskilled workers in Cape Town were never organized. If one ignores the unions which flourished briefly during the Second World War, what about the Garment Workers' Union of the Western Province, today the largest union in South Africa which has existed since 1927? What about the Food & Canning Workers' Union which was founded in 1941? My argument in the case of the garment workers is that they were not so much organized as disorganized by the union. The FCWU has always experienced great problems in organizing in Cape Town itself which has always been a weak (and until recently) often non-existent branch. (But see Lewis, 1976, pp.178-86).

83. CFLU: 16th Annual Report, 1928 (TUCSA Archives).

## Annual Report:

...With the assistance of industrial legislation the Federation has without doubt benefited, organizations have come into existence during 1925 that without legislation would never have been heard of, not that workers don't want organization but because of the economic position, afraid of the boss. Today the position is changed by the introduction of the Wage Board Act, the boss class knowing full well that they have exploited the workers and are afraid that the searchlight may be turned to their profits, and to avoid exposure the boss class is urging upon all workers either skilled or semi-skilled to become members of their trade organizations.<sup>84</sup>

There are a number of examples of Cape employers, terrified by the prospect of the new Wage Board imposing high wages on them, trying to form Industrial Councils and encouraging the unionization of their workers. Many of these efforts were initiated by W.J. Laite, then secretary of the CCI. Laite established firmer and more friendly links with the leaders of the CFLU, offering stop-order facilities for subscriptions and immediate recognition of any union they formed. So eager were Laite and Stuart to cover Cape industry with Industrial Councils, that they embarrassed the Labour Department by demanding the recognition of Councils before the participating unions or employer organizations had been registered.<sup>85</sup> Fred Richfield, "a gentleman trade unionist"<sup>86</sup> who opposed Stuart, sheds additional light on the process:

Many of the early Wage Determinations were much higher than the voluntary wages tendered by the employers who

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84. CFLU: 13th Annual Report, 1925 (GWUSA Archives).

85. This happened in the case of the garment manufacturing industry, biscuits and baking & confectionery industries. (Memoranda to Secretary for Labour, 9 May 1927; 25 August 1927, C.A.D. ARB 1058/27).

86. It is with these words that Richfield described himself in an interview in 1978. He was an independent unionist but worked closely with the Cape Districts Committee of the Trades and Labour Council for several years.

sat up and pondered on what could be done to stem this sudden attack on their profits. With the craftiness of their class and with the assistance of petty opportunists they decided to apply for Industrial Councils in order to regulate their own wages and conditions.

...This necessitated the formation of Trade Unions, and the Cape Employers began a new era in their Commercial History by forming Trade Unions to suit their own purposes and with the assistance of a group of men masquerading as Trade-Unionists were fairly successful.

The Executive of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions consists of a group of men who depend on the movement for a living and the job of Industrial Inspector is handed out to them by Robert Stuart, Secretary of the Cape Federation.

The workers in Baking Industry, Biscuits, Sweetmaking, Laundrying, Hairdressing, Tobacco, Garment Factories, Liquor & Catering Trades and now Commercial Employees have all been sent along by their bosses to attend meetings addressed by Federation Officials on the benefits of an Industrial Council. Unions are immediately formed that night, a Committee elected and an Industrial Council applied for. One or two favoured employees are elected onto the Council and take advantage of the oath of secrecy to divulge nothing of the proceedings of that Council, fees are deducted off the workers' wages and the whole machine runs smoothly after the appointment of one of the Federation officials nominated by Stuart and paid as an inspector or agent...the Federation with the employer's assistance runs these councils and makes jobs for their officials at the expense of the workers.<sup>87</sup>

These allegations against Stuart and the Federation are born out

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87. F.G. Richfield: "Policy of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions - 27th March 1934". Memorandum submitted to the 1934 Annual Conference of the TLC by F.G. Richfield, secretary, Glass Beveiling and Silvering Employees' Union and Cape Peninsula Commercial Employees Association. (TUCSA Archives).

by the facts. Stuart's reputation as a dictator, sell-out and bosses' man was well earned over his whole career. There are countless examples of his breaking strikes, dividing workers, signing low wage agreements behind their backs, colluding with employers and the police to defeat union dissidents or political activists and riding rough-shod over inconvenient clauses in constitutions.<sup>88</sup> He was supported in this by people who relied on his unions, industrial councils and the inspectorate of labour for employment. E.S. (Solly) Sachs, general secretary of the Transvaal Garment Workers' Union, clashed with Stuart continually over a twenty year period and had bitter feelings about Stuart and his associates:

...between 1926 and 1950 when he died, (Robert Stuart) did more to keep the [garment - MN] workers of the Cape on starvation wage levels than any man...unscrupulous and uncouth, cunning, crafty and crooked, without culture or education, he bossed over the majority of the workers of the Cape for twenty-five years. Surrounded by a group of loyal stooges, who held their jobs by the grace of their master, praised regularly by the capitalist press, serving faithfully the interests of the employers who willingly provided him with all the facilities, he successfully achieved two aims: 1) to keep the wages of the Cape workers down at the lowest level, and 2) to enrich himself.<sup>89</sup>

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88. Chapters four to seven of this thesis provide examples of each of these types of action in the garment industry in Cape Town up to 1939. For the period 1940 to 1950 see Nicol (1977). On Stuart's role in defeating the independent organization of millinery workers in Cape Town, see Nicol (1977); Garment Workers' Union Commission of Enquiry: Evidence of Pauline Podbrey; Millinery Association (Cape) Minutes: 24 April 1944 (CCI Archives). More generally see Stuart's own autobiography (Stuart 1950, 1951) and Sachs' unpublished draft chapter of Garment Workers in Action in the GWUSA Archives, Bce 2.2.2, pp.146-168. Stuart's partiality to employers was stressed forcefully by several people I interviewed, including David Lunn, Fred Richfield, Pauline Podbrey, and Dr. Anna Scheepers.

89. E.S. Sachs "The Struggle of the Garment Workers in the Coastal Areas" (Unpublished draft chapter for Garment Workers in Action, GWUSA Archives, Bce 2.2.2).

Throughout his life, Stuart was continually vilified as an enemy of the workers. Unlike Sachs, who promptly - and successfully - sued all who defamed him, Stuart sued for defamation only once (the respondent was Sachs!) and withdrew from the action before it came to court. He was keenly aware of criticism but rarely defended himself in writing beyond issuing denials or asserting that he had been misunderstood. On those occasions when he did defend himself, he often refused to go into details,<sup>90</sup> for to do so,

...would probably lead to unpleasant repercussion and open old wounds, which can best be left for time to heal.<sup>91</sup>

His attitude to criticism might be described as philosophical. He wrote in his autobiography,

The lot of the pioneer, in any sphere of human activity, is never free from difficulties, anxieties and disappointments. I experienced these in full measure, but what tended to dishearten me most, at times, was the criticism and hostility which were directed against me by the very persons whose position and standard of living I was striving to better. Fortunately, however, I did not allow these setbacks to deter me or to deflect me from the course which I had set myself. (Stuart, 1950i)

An obituary remarked:

Like everyone who dedicated their lives to the interests of the "bottom dog", Robert Stuart had enemies, the most bitter and the most treacherous being from among the class he sought to benefit. But was it not ever thus? Christ got the cross, Socrates the hemlock juice. But treachery never embittered him. He was aware that it

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90. This is true both of his Annual Reports and his autobiography. But see 'An open letter in which the GWU-CP PRESENTS THE TRUTH to the Garment Workers of the Transvaal', 3 September 1945, and also 'A reply to and exposure of the distortions, misstatements and methods of Solly Sachs', September 1945 (GWUSA Archives). Both pamphlets are certainly the work of Stuart.

91. CFLU: Report 1939 (TUCSA Papers). Stuart refused to write his annual report in 1939 for this reason!

was all part of the day's work and just to be accepted and endured, like any other incident, pleasant or unpleasant.<sup>92</sup>

The crucial question to pose is what allowed Stuart and his reactionary companions to so dominate the labour scene in Cape Town for such a long time, even in the face of exposure as bosses' men? Stuart's dominant rôle between 1915 and 1950 cannot be ascribed merely to the strength of his personality;<sup>93</sup> neither can the weakness of worker organization in Cape Town be ascribed merely to Stuart's existence. We need to show what conditions of class struggle in Cape Town allowed Stuart and his followers to flourish.

Richfield outlines above the workings of what I shall refer to as 'the Stuart Machine' - the immensely powerful dominator and disorganizer of Cape Town workers between 1925 and the late 1930's. The Stuart Machine relied on two supports: industrial legislation and an alliance between union officials (based in the Cape Federation) and the employers, organized in affiliates to the CCI. Internally, unions were dominated by officials. Before 1925 most unions were small and weak. They could not afford a paid full-time organizer or secretary. Stuart came to take on the secretaryship of several unions and acted for all of them.<sup>94</sup> This immediately placed him in a powerful position. He performed the vital tasks of calling meetings and administration, he became known to employers and was their immediate contact in the event of any labour dispute. As long as a union was unable to pay the full salary of its secretary no challenger would seek to unseat him. No one could afford to. After 1925, with registrations and stop-orders, the financial position of unions improved. Stuart and his followers then used and abused their constitutional power and real power as officials to keep control of the union. If this proved inadequate, they could rely on the employers to help dispose of dissident elements. Stuart established himself as the leader of labour in the Cape. He was appointed

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92. Trade Union Bulletin March 1951, "Vale" by D. Livingstone.

93. Such is the solution of Williams (1974).

94. CFLU Minutes: 3 March 1927.

to represent the Cape on the South African delegation to the Industrial Labour Organization. He used his position to block and undermine the consistent efforts of Transvaal and Natal unionists to draw the Cape into a united national trade union movement.

The Cape Federation was never a uniformly reactionary body. It always sported a 'left wing' of some description,<sup>95</sup> but this was kept 'under control' until the late 1930's. Within the unions there were recurring instances of worker and activist opposition to Stuart's type of unionism and mode of operation. These date from the early years of the CFLU.<sup>96</sup> On several occasions Stuart stepped down as secretary of a union and left it to go to oblivion in its own way after altercations with the workers. After 1925 he was less prone to let a profitable union slip from his grasp.

During the 1930's there were fierce attacks on the Federation's dominance and its reformist and reactionary politics. These revolved around the formation of a rival trade union co-ordinating body in Cape Town; the strengthening of the 'left opposition' within the Federation; and the bitter conflict between the Federation and the Transvaal Garment Workers' Union over who would organize the Cape garment workers.

Stuart's refusal to join the South African Trades and Labour Council prompted the northern unions to establish a branch of the TLC in Cape Town. This Cape Districts Committee became active in 1935 and built up an array of new unions in the sweet, chemical, brewing, explosives and food & canning industries. In 1936 Stuart was ousted as secretary of the tramways union by a left winger (J.W. Emmerich). Soon afterwards the builders' union rejected the Federation's influence. The assault launched by the Transvaal Garment Workers' Union on the                      leaders of the Cape GWU forced the Stuart Machine into the most blatant alliance with the employers. Workers could see clearly the collaborationist policy Stuart was following and, where they could, they transferred their allegiances to alternative unions.

By 1938 Stuart's monopoly on worker organization in Cape

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95. See Williams (1974).

96. For example in the tramway strike in 1915 (Stuart 1951a, b) and after the 1917 tailors' strike (Stuart 1950i). See Chapter I, footnote 103, above.



Town had been broken. The Federation was forced into a unity agreement with the Cape Districts Committee of the TLC and Stuart struggled to keep control, inveighing against "disruptionists for a unity movement",<sup>97</sup> opportunists, Communists and splitters. In 1941 Stuart resigned as secretary of the CFLU. He took offices in Woodstock, gathered around him the few unions still under his thumb (principally the garment workers), and continued his "activities in the cause of the workers"<sup>98</sup> as secretary of the new "Western Province and District Council of Trade Unions".<sup>99</sup>

In summary, a real challenge to Stuart's dominance in the Cape labour movement did not emerge until 1936/7. Before this, his position was sustained by the Stuart Machine - internal control of unions, relying on the alliance with the bosses and the industrial legislation. The industrial legislation was the means by which the Cape bosses cleverly fashioned unions sympathetic to their interests. The existence of registered, but effectively unorganized, bosses' unions delayed the emergence of 'democratic', organized trade unions in Cape Town.

## 6 Legislation, Protection and the Class Struggle in Cape Town after 1925

'In the present phase of imperialism there is really no such thing as external factors on the one hand, acting purely from 'outside', and opposed to internal factors 'isolated' in their own 'space' and outclassing the others. If we maintain the primacy of internal factors, we simply mean that those coordinates of the imperial chain that are 'external' to a country - the global balance of forces, the role of a particular great power, etc. - act only on the country in question by way of their internalization, i.e. by their articulation to its own specific contradictions. But these contradictions themselves, in certain aspects, represent the induced reproduction of the contradictions of the imperialist chain within the various individual countries.

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97. Trade Union Bulletin September 1941.

98. Trade Union Bulletin October 1941, p.36; CFLU Minutes: 3 June 1941.

99. Stuart was secretary of the WPDCTU (and the Cape Garment Workers' Union) until his death in 1950. The WPDCTU was dissolved when TUCSA was formed.

To talk of internal factors in this sense, then, is to uncover the real role that imperialism (uneven development) plays in the evolution of the various social formations.'

- Nicos Poulantzas (1977, p.22)

Most analytical writing on South African labour history in the period preceding the Second World War has concentrated on the gold mining industry and the Witwatersrand. The Witwatersrand was the industrial hub of South Africa and a focus of political struggle. A history of the Witwatersrand demonstrates that the class struggle is a political struggle as well as an economic struggle. There is an organic interlinkage of trade union organization, the 1922 Strike, industrial legislation and the "civilized labour policy". The conditions of class struggle on the Witwatersrand are determined largely on the Witwatersrand.

This is not at all the case in Cape Town. In a sense, class struggle in Cape Town is a discontinuous process because changes in its conditions are periodically dictated from outside. The manufacturers of Cape Town, despite a twenty year campaign, never won tariff protection from Cape commercial interests or the mines. Industrial protection was granted because of struggles in the north. The Industrial Conciliation Act was not directed at the labour movement in the Cape, nor were the Cape unions responsible for 'winning' the Wage Act. Yet both of these Acts are applied in the Cape with far-reaching results. The class struggle in Cape Town is thrown 'forward' by what is, for the Cape, a series of shocks which alter the conditions of class struggle. This process is an effect of the uneven development of capitalism in South Africa and appears, in the present instance, as the dominance of the Witwatersrand over the Cape.

In assessing the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town after 1925, one must acknowledge the pivotal effects of the policy of industrial protection and the new industrial legislation on determining the shape of the labour movement in Cape Town. It is significant that the industrial legislation did not arise out of the class struggle in Cape Town. It thus had a particularly severe rupturing effect on the class struggle in Cape Town. It is this that accounts for the dominance of the Stuart Machine in the ten to fifteen years before the War.

Emphasis on the effects of industrial legislation and industrial protection in Cape Town provide only a partial explanation of the changed conditions of class struggle in Cape Town after 1925. One must still explain why the new legislation and policies of the state had the particular effects they did by reference to concrete conditions. These 'external factors' acted on the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town and transformed them. However, the precise way in which they acted was determined by the conditions of class struggle already existing in Cape Town. A process of class struggle also shaped their efforts. This chapter has raised three 'internal' determinants of the path taken by the economic class struggle in Cape Town. These are the nature of capitalism in Cape Town, the weakness of organization in the Cape labour movement, and the modest but successful organization of the manufacturers. It is useful to stress how the second factor is related to the first.

The nature of capitalism in the Cape was different from that in the Transvaal. As we have said, Cape Town was dominated by commercial and comprador capital. It never became a significant industrial centre. Lacking any natural resources, beyond a supply of cheap black labour, manufacturing enterprise concentrated in food processing, building and consumer goods industries. Clothing was the only local industry to become of any significance in the national economy. The character of the labour movement was strongly influenced by the limited base of production in Cape Town (in contrast with that represented by the mining and associated industries on the Witwatersrand). Industrial unionism in Cape Town lacked a sound material base. Manufacturing concerns tended to be small with a low organic composition of capital. This, combined with pressures from imports which continued after 1925, set definite limits on wage levels and made for a less successful economic class struggle. The working class was divided on skill lines (though not on racial lines) and the traditions of craft unionism dominated the CFLU.

Our study of the garment workers in the following five chapters suggests how the interaction of the industrial legislation and the policy of industrial protection, with the backwardness of Cape Town capitalism, conditions in the labour movement and

the organization of the manufacturers, combined to determine the specific conditions of class struggle that gave rise to the Stuart Machine and a boss-union alliance after 1925.

These factors are essential to understanding the organizational history of garment workers in Cape Town but they are obviously insufficient to characterise the full social and political context of garment workers. Our present study does not lead us to take account of the whole arena of political class struggle in Cape Town (as it does the arena of economic class struggle). We get glimpses into the activities of the Communist Party and other marginal groupings who are important in trade union struggles, but we are not able to appreciate the full context in which their political activity takes place or how they link economic and political struggle. We are not led either to examine the role of political groups like the African Peoples' Organization, the All African Convention or the National Liberation League, none of which had any special interest in the organization of labour. Consequently we can only note the separation of the economic and political struggles and the non-involvement of organized workers in the political campaigns of the time - over the Hertzog Bills, the housing crisis and city council politics. It is not possible, in this thesis, to investigate these characteristics of the class struggle in Cape Town satisfactorily.

The focus of this thesis is the garment and tailoring workers of Cape Town. In order to explain their suffering, their exploitation and domination, we have invoked two themes, both of which seek also to extend the relevance of the thesis beyond the garment industry. The first relates to the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town and the second to the effects of the industrial legislation of the 1920's both in Cape Town and in South Africa generally.

The wider aim of the first theme is to illustrate the need for a regional mapping of class struggles in South Africa. This chapter has set out some of the obvious differences in the tenor of the class struggle between Cape Town and the rest of South Africa, specifically the Witwatersrand. General statements have been made about the nature of the economic class struggle in Cape Town before and after 1925. These will be further elucidated by a close study of the Cape garment industry after 1925. While

this cannot alone account for or map out the whole terrain of class struggle in Cape Town, our study of this fast-growing sector of Cape manufacturing industry can provide suggestive pointers.

A statement of the main differences between the garment industries of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town indicates the aspects of class struggle in Cape Town which the thesis will attempt to explain. On the Witwatersrand after 1925 there is a garment industry in which militant worker action directed by a strong trade union is a constant factor. In addition, through participation in the union, garment workers are drawn into political class struggle as well. In Cape Town a fighting spirit among the garment workers emerges into the open only occasionally, and even then it is never spontaneous but is initiated and taken forward only with the aid and cajolement of organizers in the pay of the Transvaal union. The workers are never drawn into political struggles through any of the unions which attempt to organize them. In Johannesburg, organized worker strength is a crucial factor in improving wages and conditions. In Cape Town, wages and conditions improve - at a slower pace and to a lower level - without any organized pressure from local workers. In the Transvaal, the union (aided by sympathetic employers on the industrial council) continually disciplines employers to follow the agreement and organizes successfully against police intimidation. In Cape Town, workers are unprotected from victimisation by their employers, the police and the Department of Labour.

The comparison between the conditions of class struggle facing garment workers in the Cape and Transvaal is heightened by the two direct attempts of the Transvaal garment workers' union to export their strategies and forms of organization to Cape Town. In 1930-1 and 1934-8 Transvaal organizers tried to build in Cape Town a militant garment workers' trade union on the lines of the successful Transvaal union. On both occasions they failed. We shall show this failure to be rooted in the specific conditions of class struggle in Cape Town.

The second theme has been mentioned in the context of the different effects which industrial legislation had on stimulating organization in Cape Town as opposed to the Transvaal. The

similarities in the ways that the legislation operated in the two centres however allow an argument of wider relevance to be advanced.

Marxist theory in general and theories of the capitalist state in particular have played a key role in the reinterpretation of twentieth century South African economic history. This reinterpretation, and particularly that represented by Davies (1979) and Kaplan (1977), has had the effect of shunting the economic struggles of white wage earners after 1924, and with them the struggles of all trade unions registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act, into a siding of irrelevance. After 1924, white workers were effectively 'isolated', they were co-opted into support for the forms of state, they accepted the bounds placed on their economic struggles by the labour legislation of the 1920's, they accepted the enervating protection of a legalized colour bar. As Kaplan says, the white trade unions were incorporated into the state structures in a way that ensured "that no direct confrontation between capital and the white wage earners on a scale comparable to the Rand revolt was repeated" (1977, p.109). From then on South African history had as its principal actors capital (national, imperial, large, small) and the black dominated classes. White wage earners were important only in their support (or lack of it) for Afrikaner Nationalism in elections.<sup>100</sup> The bureaucratic, co-optive and racially divisive tendencies of the Industrial Conciliation Act prevented white unions - and by implication mixed or 'coloured' unions - from playing any significant role in the class struggle.

With the benefit of hindsight such an analysis is easily accepted. But, by being 'institutionalized', class struggle involving white wage earners and black members of registered unions did not cease. It took on new forms. The process through which class struggle came to take on these new forms has never been investigated. Davies (1979) and others convincingly demonstrate

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100. Much recent writing on white trade unions is on this topic. See for example O'Meara (1978 and 1979); Davies (1979, Chapter 7); Lewis, J. (1977 and 1978); Berger (1982); Touyz (1979 and 1982). With the exception of Lewis, D. (1976 and 1978), the fact that many registered unions had a large black membership is ignored.

the potential of the 1920's legislation and the "civilized labour policy" to tame the white wage earners and can refer to various statistics, the corruption and bureaucratisation of several unions and the absence of a strong labour movement to prove the point. However they never analyse the process through which the legislation successfully contained the economic struggles of white wage earners.<sup>101</sup>

Trade union strategies of organizing underwent a marked change after the advent of the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts. Despite wide recognition of the divisive intentions of the legislation and criticism of the restrictions placed on the right to strike, the trade unions straightaway entered into the spirit of the new industrial relations system. Their participation, as much as that of the employers, determined the real effects of the legislation on their organization. For just as labour and capital adapted to the new controls, the new legislation itself underwent a process of adaptation to the class struggle. This process was subject to least constraint in the early years before the Department of Labour, the courts, the employers and the unions had developed policies and established procedures. In 1924 the Industrial Conciliation Act was legislation, by the War it had become a practice and this practice developed out of class struggle.

The initial application of the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts produced enormous discontent and conflict amongst workers (and manufacturers). This was attended by confusion and uncertainty about the scope and legality of wage determinations and agreements. The pressure of worker anger combined with complaints from manufacturers brought about changes in the operation of the institutions at the centre of the new system as well as several amendments to the laws. The white trade unions did not go gentle into that good night. They raged and fulminated against the incompetence of the Minister of Labour, the stupidity of the courts and the blindness of the Labour Department. Union leaders such as Bill Andrews,

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101. It is not important for their purposes to do this. The racial polarisation of the South African working class alone tended to confine the political relevance of white wage earners to parliamentary elections.

the secretary of the SATUC and SATLC, warned unions that they should not look to the government but to their own organization to secure the legal wages set in determinations and agreements.<sup>102</sup> Where wages and conditions improved most there was always a strong union to hand. Registered unions in the 1920's and 1930's did not become overnight the same disorganizers of the workers that they are today. The emasculation of the registered unions only began in 1924. It is presumptuous to maintain that the dulling of worker militancy by means of the legislation requires no explanation.<sup>103</sup> We need to follow through the struggles which finally allowed bureaucracy and legalism to triumph and which maintained racial divisions even within 'mixed' unions.

The pattern of class struggle which continued within the confines of the industrial council system after 1924 is of vital interest today when a new mass of unorganized workers is being drawn into trade unions, several of which participate in, or are confronted by, industrial councils.

This study on the garment workers of the Cape shows how class struggle was expressed through the institutions of the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts in the case of workers who were in a weak economic position and were badly organized. The legislation played a role in keeping them so. A comparison of the experiences of garment workers in Johannesburg and Cape Town in the 1920's and 1930's shows that only with strong organization could a union in an industrial council act as a weapon of the workers. The Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts conferred few advantages on unorganized workers and in the Cape garment industry both were ultimately weapons of the bosses in maintaining the disorganization of the workers.

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102. Ironically, the same point was made most forcefully by Ivan Walker, the Chief Inspector of Labour, at the SATUC Congress in 1928. Walker emphasised that he spoke "as a trade unionist, and not as a Government official". (Cape Times 9 April 1928).

103. This point is made briefly in Fine, le Clercq and Innes (1981) but their vague reference to "definite historical conditions and a particular balance of class forces" (p.47), none of which are specified, hardly sustains it.



## CHAPTER III

THE DEMISE OF THE ILL-FATED JOURNEYMEN TAILORS' ASSOCIATION

'People will always want clothes - no matter which government is in power....Next to food, clothing constitutes man's most vital necessity. Tailoring, then, is a trade with an assured future.'

- A.W. Allon, "How to Start a Career in Tailoring" (1928)

The following two chapters describe the experience which the Cape clothing trades had of the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts in the first years of their operation. We wish to draw a distinction between the effects the legislation had on the clothing factories and on bespoke tailoring in Cape Town. In the case of the factories, the legislation had an extremely beneficial effect and aided the process of expansion set in motion by the imposition of protective tariffs on clothing in 1925. To the tailoring trades, however, the legislation brought only discord and speeded the slow eclipse which has marked their history in most developed countries. For the Wage Board sought to end many of the traditional practices of the clothing trade - outwork, piecewages, long hours and dirty workrooms. Such changes could easily be given effect by factories but they were conditions of existence for many tailors. They threatened not just to reform the trade, but to revolutionize it.

The future for the clothing industry lay in factory production. It is with factory workers that this thesis is primarily concerned. But before showing how the foundations for the future were laid, we will look back at the destruction of the past.

The destruction of the tailoring workshop was no more the precondition for the rise of the clothing factory than the rise of the factory signalled a final end to all tailoring. Certainly tailors became fewer as readymade clothing improved in quality and out-competed the cheaper tailor-made suits. But tailors continued to exist. What the Wage Board challenged was the way the tailoring trade was ordered, it sought to end the evils associated with outwork, sub-contracting and sweating. It sought to revolutionize the tailoring trade by confining tailoring to registered workshops or factories and stopping work in the home. In this aim it did not, could not, succeed completely. But its attempts

brought confusion and hardship to journeymen tailors in Cape Town, where these operatives were particularly vulnerable.

The sad tale of the Journeymen Tailors' Association (JTA) cannot be said to be of any major historical importance. The number of people concerned was small, the Association had no discernible impact on later events in the tailoring trade, yet it provides a useful focus around which to trace the effects of the industrial legislation on the tailoring trade. It is a poignant illustration of how the ineluctable class struggle decides the real effect of laws and touches the lives of the most insignificant people. The history of the JTA and the tailoring trade at the time highlights tendencies in the Cape Chamber of Industries, the Cape Federation of Labour Unions, the Department of Labour and the Wage Board which emerge again and with more moment in the struggles around the factory section of the clothing industry. The new legislation created potentially powerful new structures in industry. No one was quite sure how each ought to function. Everyone was fumbling for the responses or actions that would advance their own interests or policies. This was as much the case with the newly formed Department of Labour and the Wage Board as with the unions, employers' organizations and industrial councils.

#### 1 The Journeymen Join the Club

In 1925, the tailoring trades in Cape Town were much as described in Chapter one. There existed the merchant tailors, measuring and fitting customers for clothing; the journeymen or master tailors who took the cut cloth from the merchant tailor and arranged the making of the garments; and the tailoring workers who actually stitched, sewed and pressed. These three "classes of person" in the trade might all be collapsed into one individual making clothes for customers himself, but more often they were as distinct in practice as in principle. A great degree of variation in organization and in conditions of work between shops was found by the Wage Board in 1926.<sup>1</sup> Some merchant tailors had 'inside shops' attached to their premises where clothes were made up under

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1. Wage Board Report: Bespoke Tailoring Industry for Certain Areas, 23 February 1928, paragraph 29.

a master tailor. Others gave out work to journeymen who had their own workshops or worked from their homes. Some journeymen employed workers in 'sets', each doing a specific operation; some relied on unpaid help from their families. Some workers were paid for each garment they sewed or pressed, others received a weekly wage. The Wage Board noted that:

The conditions in tailoring establishments in the Peninsula ranged from some that were ideal to some that can only be described as disgusting.<sup>2</sup>

It also found the rates of pay in Cape Town to be amongst the lowest in the country.

In March 1926, eight of Cape Town's leading merchant tailors came together to create "an organization for the protection and assistance of those firms engaged in the Bespoke Tailoring Trade".<sup>3</sup> They agreed on a name - the Cape Western Merchant Tailors' Association (MTA), a constitution, and went forth to recruit additional members, of whom they expected about 50. W.J. Laite was appointed secretary and he arranged with the executive of the CCI that merchant tailors could become members at a special reduced subscription of three guineas a year.<sup>4</sup> The MTA was formed without any immediate object although its general purpose was clearly to safeguard the interests of the merchant tailors should an industrial council be formed or a Wage Board investigation ordered.

The tailoring trade presented unique problems for statutory wage regulation. Its small scale and decentralised nature made enforcement a mammoth task. Uniformity in conditions of work between home workrooms and factories was impossible. But the three tier structure of the trade created the most immediate difficulties. Were the journeymen employers or workers? They combined elements of both. They were paid by merchant tailors to arrange the making up of garments, and invariably did part of the work themselves. They were paid as workers according to a log (wage scale). But out of their income, they had to pay their assistants

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2. Wage Board Report: Bespoke Tailoring Industry for Certain Areas, 23 February 1928, paragraph 29.

3. Cape Western Merchant Tailors Association Minutes: 15 March 1926 - M3/1.

4. MTA Minutes: 25 March 1926 - M3/1.

and here acted as employers. This posed a problem for wage regulation under the new legislation. Should minimum rates be set between journeymen and their workers or between the merchant tailor and the journeyman? Did merchant tailors have any right to decide on the wage paid by the journeymen to their workers? These are the questions behind the conflict between the JTA, the MTA and the Bespoke Tailoring Union in Cape Town in the late 1920's.

The same problems confronted the merchant tailors, journeymen and tailoring workers in other regions of South Africa. These problems were not resolved in exactly the same manner in every region. The tailoring trade provides an instructive example of how the same industrial legislation, in the same branch of production, could foster forms of worker and employer organization that differed in important respects. On the Witwatersrand and in Port Elizabeth industrial councils were established in the tailoring trade. However, in Johannesburg the journeymen were organized together with the merchant tailors in an employers' association<sup>5</sup> while, in Port Elizabeth, the journeymen were organized with the workers in the trade union.<sup>6</sup> In Cape Town, conflict over the place of the journeymen under the industrial laws was a factor in the failure of all attempts to establish an industrial council. Consequently the Wage Board came to rule over the Cape Town tailoring trade.

It is one of the themes of this thesis that the real effects of the industrial laws of the 1920's cannot be understood outside of the conditions of class struggle in which they operated. The laws did not have a uniform effect in every area because the conditions of class struggle in the various regions of South Africa differed significantly. The example of the tailoring trade lends strong support to this argument. Although the specific forms of organization in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth are only referred to in passing, the case of the tailoring trade in Cape Town is used to demonstrate clearly that class struggles moulded the effects of the industrial legislation on this branch of Cape Town industry. Forms of worker and employer organization are

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5. See footnote 97 below.

6. See footnote 44 below.

not only the result of all-determining laws nor can specific forms of organization be assumed to exist everywhere in South Africa merely because they predominate on the Witwatersrand or were the intended results of the industrial legislation.

The JTA was formed in Cape Town early in 1926 to serve the interests of all who took in work from merchant tailors. It included the Malay tailors who did this work but the majority of the journeymen were white and many of them were Jewish.<sup>7</sup> The journeymen were never quite certain of whether they were employers or employees. They styled their organization an 'Association' or a 'Union' as their perceptions of their role changed.<sup>8</sup> The hermaphroditic character of the JTA put it at a great disadvantage when applying for official registration under the Industrial Conciliation Act. The Act recognised only 'employers' and 'employees' and no one could decide which they were. Their applications for registration were consequently all put on one side and forgotten.

In 1926 the journeymen saw themselves as the underpaid employees of the merchant tailors. They wanted to align themselves with their assistants in the newly formed Bespoke Tailoring Union (BTU) and applied to be admitted as a sub-section of the Union. The BTU, in the person of its secretary, Robert Stuart, rejected the journeymen out of hand. They were the employers of Union members and could not possibly join the Union themselves.<sup>9</sup>

It was widely rumoured that an industrial council for bespoke tailoring would soon be formed. Scared that they might be excluded, the journeymen asked for a meeting with the MTA to "ascertain what position the Master Tailors or Foremen Tailors would occupy in connection with the industry under the new legislation".<sup>10</sup> The merchant tailors were not sure how to respond. They were

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7. Interview with Mr. A. Sadulla, a former member of the JTA.
  8. Journeymen Tailors' Union of the Cape Peninsula: Constitution, 1926. Central Archives Depot (S.A.B.) ARB240 51465/79. The JTA was first known as the "Master Tailors' Union" and later as the "Master Tailors' Association".
  9. MTA Minutes: 10 May 1926; 16 August 1926, - joint meeting with the JTA - M3/1.
  10. MTA Minutes: 10 May 1926 - M3/1.

agreed,

...as to the advisability of endeavouring to evolve some method by which Merchant Tailors could maintain control of the Journeyman Tailors' organization and yet co-operate with them to the advantage of the trade.<sup>11</sup>

But they were unsure of how this would best be achieved. Over the next three years, the merchant tailors thrice decided to include the JTA as a sub-section of their organization and thrice resolved against amalgamation.<sup>12</sup> On each occasion their decision was based on how they thought the journeymen would best be controlled. Their perceptions of this underwent changes as new threats and possibilities became revealed in the application of the industrial laws.

Merchant tailors enjoyed a dominant economic position in the tailoring trade in Cape Town. They controlled the giving out of work. They were able to play-off the sub-contractors against one another to keep prices down. In the absence of a strong sub-contractors' organization, journeymen were easily held in check by the merchant tailors. In addition, the MTA was registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act and hence would be an automatic member of any industrial council formed in the tailoring trade. The JTA was unregistrable under the Act and unrecognised by the government. The journeymen had to attach themselves either to the trade union or the merchant tailors if they wanted to be part of the planned industrial council. They could be pressured into making concessions to whichever party accepted them.<sup>13</sup> The Union had already refused them membership, so on 10 May 1926 the MTA decided to absorb the JTA as a sub-section. The plan was that the journeymen would conduct their own business in their own way but would meet together with the merchant tailors on ques-

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11. MTA Minutes: 10 May 1926 - M3/1.

12. The decisions to absorb the JTA were recorded in the MTA minutes of 10 May 1926, 22 June 1926 and 14 January 1929. Each decision was reversed in the minutes of 27 May 1926, 12 August 1926 and 23 January 1929 respectively - M3/1.

13. The merchant tailors were concerned to stop journeymen dealing directly with the public. This deprived them of business and of the profit on cloth which was important to them.

tions where the interests of both were concerned.<sup>14</sup>

This decision was reversed at a meeting two weeks later at which the majority favoured the journeymen joining the BTU. J.W.K. Stephens of Garlick's Stores opposed this. He said that there were two choices open to the merchant tailors. Either they could,

...alter their existing methods of conducting their business, and start their own workshops, and have nothing whatever to do with the Journeymen Tailors' Association...

or they could recognise

...that these men, under existing conditions, were essential to the satisfactory conduct of the business of the Merchant Tailors, and...it was to their advantage to make some arrangement which would enable them to co-operate with these men, and perhaps in some measure, to control them when an Industrial Council was formed.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the feeling of the meeting, that journeymen should not belong to the MTA, Laite was asked to prepare suggestions for admitting the journeymen as a sub-section.<sup>16</sup>

The debate on the merits of admitting the journeymen continued over the next few months. No deep division emerged within the MTA, but there were two distinct opinions on the role of journeymen. Several tailors who had workshops of their own favoured excluding the journeymen from the MTA and allowing them to become ordinary workmen. They suggested that other tailors without their own workshops could combine and build common workrooms. They would then be freed from their reliance on the journeymen who took in private work when they had not sufficient work from the merchant tailors.<sup>17</sup>

The majority, however, wanted to retain the traditional organization of the trade.

Those of them who had run tailoring workshops knew how

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14. MTA Minutes: 10 May 1926; 27 May 1926 - M3/1.

15. MTA Minutes: 27 May 1926 - M3/1.

16. Ibid.

17. MTA Minutes: 8 June 1926 - M3/1.

expensive and unsafe a business it was. The journeyman tailor could be dispensed with, but at present he was a very useful person, as he solved the problem of a workroom and all the expenses connected with it.<sup>18</sup>

There were additional advantages in continuing dealings with journeymen once minimum wages were enforced by law. The journeymen would be responsible for giving effect to the law and,

...the Merchant Tailor would be free from the worry of terms of payment, workers and hours of work. Further, the merchant tailor could devote more time to his business and organize it better.<sup>19</sup>

Before deciding finally on how to deal with the journeymen, the MTA held a "non-committal conference" with representatives of the Bespoke Tailoring Union. The BTU was an early product of the 'understanding' between the CCI and the CFLU that was to be a feature of the labour scene in Cape Town for the following decade. The circumstances of its birth are of special interest also because in early 1927 the BTU, having already changed its name twice, chose a fourth and final title of the "Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula" (GWU-CP). At the same time, it amended its constitution to allow for the membership of workers employed in all branches of the clothing trades in Cape Town. The BTU was thus the forerunner of the GWU-CP, the union which is the principal institutional actor in this history of the clothing workers of Cape Town.<sup>20</sup>

It seems that the new organization of clothing workers was initiated by W.J. Laite, the secretary of the CCI. On Wednesday 17 February 1926 Laite put through a telephone call to Bob Stuart, the secretary of the CFLU, and asked him to organize a union. Stuart apparently agreed as Laite sent him a letter to confirm the arrangement. This letter is a fitting founding document for

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18. MTA Minutes: 8 June 1926 - M3/1.

19. Ibid.

20. The Cape Peninsula Bespoke Tailoring Union applied for registration under the Industrial Conciliation Act in May 1926. (Stuart to Secretary of Labour, 6 May 1926 S.A.B. ARB210 51465/71).



a worker organization which has been stigmatized by three generations of critics as a "bosses' union".

Dear Mr. Stuart, [wrote Laite]

As promised on the telephone today, I have pleasure in enclosing you a list of firms in the Peninsula engaged in the Bespoke Tailoring trade.

At the moment the question of organizing the employers in this trade is under discussion, with a view to the formation of an Industrial Council, and it is necessary that the employees should also be organized to enable them to appoint responsible representatives to serve on a Conciliation Board should that policy be decided upon, it will be necessary for you to undertake the work from the employees side of the question.<sup>21</sup>

Stuart soon had the Union set up and in due course applied for its registration under the Industrial Conciliation Act. None of the office bearers was in the tailoring trade. Stuart himself, a monumental mason, was the secretary. Two members of the Federation executive, the one a printer and the other a carpenter, were chairman and treasurer.<sup>22</sup> The BTU was the creation of the law, the bosses and the CFLU - not the tailoring workers. Nevertheless this Union had drawn up a schedule of wages which had been approved at a well-attended meeting in the Trades Hall.

The BTU first met with the MTA in June 1926. Stanley George Raddall of the printers' union was the chairman of the BTU. He opened the joint meeting with the MTA with a strongly worded declaration of the Union's wish to abolish the systems of piecework and sub-contracting in the trade:

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21. Letter from Laite to Stuart, 17 February 1926 (GWUSA Archives, Bcc 1.20.1). The original of this letter is part of the GWUSA records because it was appropriated by Solly Sachs from the CFLU records in 1946 when he was seeking material to defend his assertion that the Cape bosses had called in Stuart to organize the GWU-CP. Stuart had brought a court action for defamation against Sachs. Sachs had access to the CFLU records since, by then, the CFLU had been taken over by the TLC. There is a fair quantity of other CFLU documents, also 'lifted' by Sachs in 1946, in the GWUSA archives.

22. Neither the MTA nor the Department of Labour were happy with this situation. See MTA Minutes: 15 June 1926 - M3/2; Memorandum, 19 May 1926, initialled I.W. (Ivan Walker, the Chief Inspector of Labour) S.A.B. ARB210 51465/71.

If Merchant Tailors were aware of the conditions under which many garments were made, he was sure they would agree with the Union. They intended that the system should be stopped. They maintained that all clothing should be made in hygienic workshops, properly supervised by the employers, and under Government inspection. He knew it would be stated that the Union was asking for a big thing. That was admitted; it was a big and radical change....But from the humane point of view, it would be agreed that a change was necessary.<sup>23</sup>

The merchant tailors agreed that some steps should be taken to bring into operation hygienic workrooms but asked what the Union proposed should be done about the journeymen. The Union representatives said that journeymen would either have to become foremen, simple employees of the merchant tailors, or else should join the MTA as employers - as merchant tailors not middlemen.

The Union's demand for the abolition of piecework was rejected outright. As Stephens explained later,

...although the Merchant Tailors saw the need for certain changes and improvements in the Industry, they were not prepared to revolutionize the trade. To adopt time rates at this stage would be disastrous.<sup>24</sup>

Discussion on the Union's wage schedule, which the merchant tailors found unacceptable, would follow the formation of an industrial council.<sup>25</sup>

The Union delegation had claimed a membership approaching two thousand but Laite sent a wire to the Registrar of Trade Unions to check that the Union was,

...accepted by your Department as thoroughly representative of the workers' interest in this trade.<sup>26</sup>

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23. MTA Minutes: 15 June 1926 - M3/2.

24. Industrial Council for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry Minutes: 29 November 1926 - M3/2.

25. MTA Minutes: 15 June 1926 - M3/2.

26. Letter from Laite to the Registrar of Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations, 21 June 1926 S.A.B. ARB210 51465/71.

The Registrar replied that according to his records the BTU had 154 members, while the MTA employed 350 people. He said that the Union could be registered but that it was "very doubtful whether the Minister would consider it sufficiently representative to justify the registration of an Industrial Council".<sup>27</sup>

In consequence, renewed attention was paid to the question of the journeymen. Some merchant tailors urged that the wages paid to operatives were not properly their concern, whether these were set by the Wage Board or an industrial council. The journeymen "were the actual employers"<sup>28</sup> not the merchant tailors.

...(T)he Merchant Tailor bought his goods from the Journeyman in the same way as any other person bought from a contractor.<sup>29</sup>

Stephens finally persuaded his fellow merchant tailors to admit the journeymen as members of a sub-section of the MTA. He argued firstly that the MTA was in a position to dictate terms. Theirs was the only properly organized body in the trade; the journeymen had been rejected by the Union and had not been given recognition by the government.

(This) put the Merchant Tailors in a strong position, and consequently they could regulate the industry.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, Stephens warned that the Wage Board might intervene in bespoke tailoring. It was already busy with an investigation of the clothing factories in Cape Town. Once the tailoring workers complained to the Board about their low wages, the journeymen would say they could afford no more because of the low rates paid by the merchant tailors.

He thought the Merchant Tailors would find the position hard if the Wage Board acted, because they would have to fight the combined forces of labour, and the result

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27. Letter from the Registrar to Laite, 21 June 1926 S.A.B. ARB210 51465/71. Stuart was incensed by this reply to Laite and wrote an incoherent but hot-worded letter to the Registrar. This was not well received. The Registrar asked the Secretary of Labour to delay the registration of Stuart's Fishermens', Builders' and Tailors' unions until his letter was "withdrawn and replaced with communications which conform to a standard of ordinary decency". (Letter, 7 July 1926 *ibid.*)

28. MTA Minutes: 22 June 1926 - M3/1.

29. *Ibid.*

30. MTA Minutes: 8 June 1926 - M3/1.

might be a higher log than the industry could bear profitably.<sup>31</sup>

The MTA had a close interest in admitting the JTA and co-operating closely with it in the drawing up of a log with the Union.

Once amalgamation had been settled in principle, there remained the problem of who would be eligible for membership of the sub-section. The JTA comprised between 60 and 70 members and admitted "any man taking tailoring work from a shop".<sup>32</sup> The merchant tailors said this was "no qualification".<sup>33</sup>

The government was very much opposed to work being carried on in the homes of workers, and was taking every step to stop it....much weeding-out would have to be done to secure only "bona fide" Journeyman Tailors.<sup>34</sup>

The journeymen "stated that few of them employed more than two or three assistants, and some only one".

The Merchant Tailors' representatives emphasized the need for reform. Some would suffer but the position could perhaps be alleviated by isolated units combining into groups and working in co-operative workrooms, which would have to be registered as factories.<sup>35</sup>

The merchant tailors promised to give out work only to members of the journeyman sub-section. Solomon Valbene, the chairman of the JTA,

...stated that he thought the formation of the sub-section an excellent thing. It would assist the industry and solve the question of mixed prices and eliminate unfair competition.<sup>36</sup>

Subsequently, a meeting of all the members of the JTA confirmed the

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31. MTA Minutes: 22 June 1926 - M3/1.

32. MTA Minutes: 8 July 1926 - M3/1.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid. Journeymen would similarly take in work only from recognised merchant tailors and not deal directly with the public.

recommendation of their leaders that they should become a sub-section of the MTA.<sup>37</sup>

In July 1926, the Wage Board was directed to prepare a report and recommendation on the bespoke tailoring industry. The news was received with mixed feelings by the MTA. On the one hand, given the difficulties they had faced in forming an industrial council, they were relieved that the Wage Board "was undertaking the responsibility of dealing with the complications arising from the peculiar conditions existing in the industry", and promised it every assistance.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the merchant tailors saw they had to have a strategy to safeguard their particular interests. They decided to continue negotiations with the journey-men for a log,

...which would be acceptable to members of the Bespoke Tailors' Union, and at the same time afford the Master Tailors [i.e. journeymen - MN] a living without raising the cost of production above the purchasing power of the public.<sup>39</sup>

This would allow a "fairly representative" log to be presented to the Wage Board. In addition,

The Merchant Tailors should co-operate with the Journeyman Tailors and they should agree on the evidence they would give at the inquiry of the Board. By representing a united front they would impress the Wage Board, and by adopting this method of procedure they would be more successful than otherwise.<sup>40</sup>

Laite was mandated to draw up a Memorandum to the Wage Board "setting out the necessity of continuing with the piece-work system".<sup>41</sup>

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37. MTA Minutes: 9 August 1926 M3/1. The meeting was on 18 July.

38. MTA Minutes: 9 August 1926 - M3/1.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

The journeymen were pleased to have been accepted by the MTA as a sub-section. They would now be able to participate formally in deciding how the tailoring trades would adapt to the new order of things hinted at by the Wage Board and the government. The MTA were satisfied that by including the journeymen in their organization they would be able to control them.

## 2 Blackballed!

These plans were upset by news that an industrial council agreement had been gazetted for the bespoke tailoring industry in Port Elizabeth. It appeared that the journeymen tailors there had,

...amalgamated with the operatives and hence formed part of the employees' side of the agreement.<sup>42</sup>

The agreement specified a piece-work log which met with general approval as to its reasonableness. Laite believed that the Port Elizabeth agreement would be used as a basis for the Wage Board as conditions there were similar to those in Cape Town. The JTA had just presented their proposed log to the MTA which was generally agreed to be unreasonable and in certain instances even ridiculous.<sup>43</sup> The Port Elizabeth example was attractive to the MTA. Its members saw the Port Elizabeth log, already printed in the Government Gazette, as something of a precedent. Why should they worry to argue with the JTA about their ridiculously high demands? The Port Elizabeth rates could surely be applied in Cape Town too. The MTA swiftly reversed its decision to admit journeymen to a sub-section of the MTA. It resolved that the journeymen should rather apply again for membership of the Bespoke Tailors' Union. This opportunism of the MTA was born of the uncertainty that surrounded the operation of the new industrial laws. It was an opportunism that did not end with the peremptory expulsion of the journeymen.<sup>44</sup>

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42. MTA Minutes: 12 August 1926 M3/1.

43. Ibid.

44. The Port Elizabeth agreement was a specious reason for the MTA to reject the journeymen as members. There were very few journeymen in Port Elizabeth and most tailoring work was done by tailors (often Malays) who made complete garments. Journeymen did not 'amalgamate' with their employees. Stephens appears to have made this point, but did not press it. (MTA Minutes: 12 August 1926 - M3/1; see also Wage Board Report, 23 February 1928 op.cit., paragraph 24.)

The MTA also began to reassess its abandonment of an industrial council. Stuart had approached Laite and asked that negotiations for a council be resumed in spite of the Wage Board investigation. Laite told the MTA that, in his opinion,

The peculiar character of the industry which involved the complicated inclusion of a third party [the journeymen - MN] made the formation of an Industrial Council very necessary.<sup>45</sup>

Laite said further, that as the request for the formation of an industrial council had come from the Union,

...the Merchant Tailors might be successful in getting them to accept the Journeymen Tailors as part of their organization if it were emphasized that an Industrial Council could not be formed unless this happened.<sup>46</sup>

In the interim, the MTA appointed a sub-committee to draft a log on the basis of those submitted by the JTA and BTU and the Port Elizabeth agreement. The new log should take "into account that the journeymen tailors should be allowed a margin of profit".<sup>47</sup>

Confronted with their unexpected rejection by the MTA, the JTA expressed doubts that they would find a home in the BTU. Their last approach had been most vehemently dismissed. Stuart had said he would not have amalgamation "even if it cost him his job".<sup>48</sup> The JTA expressed thanks for the kind way its representatives had been received by the merchant tailors and for the advice and assistance they had been given.

It was at this stage that Laite drew up a memorandum to the Wage Board on behalf of the MTA.<sup>49</sup> As required, this set out

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45. MTA Minutes: 12 August 1926 - M3/1.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. MTA Minutes: 16 August 1926 - M3/1.

49. Memorandum from the Cape Western Merchant Tailors' Association, Wage Board Investigation, Bespoke Tailoring Industry (no date). S.A.B. ARB240 1054/266. This was read out at a MTA general meeting on 25 August 1926 and praised by the chairman as a "masterly document" (MTA Minutes - M3/1).

an argument for retaining piece-work, but it was most significant for its strong support for the continued existence of journeymen tailors and its insistence that a place should be found for them in any restructuring of the tailoring trade. These views were almost totally reversed over the following six months.

In the memorandum, the merchant tailors agreed that home work was undesirable and that tailoring workers ought to be allowed a "reasonably decent standard of living"<sup>50</sup> but they asserted that these conditions could be satisfied in a new system which still included the journeymen tailors. The journeymen were skilled craftsmen and essential to ensure that work was done properly; they allowed the existence of smaller merchant tailors who were not large enough to operate their own workshops; journeymen trained young people to become tailors. At the same time they lacked the "capital, organizing ability and business acumen" to take business from the public and in turn eliminate the merchant tailor. They were specialists in "the science of production".<sup>51</sup>

The merchant tailors noted that the BTU wanted to eliminate the middlemen and to have the merchant tailor deal directly with union members. They pointed out that in the past a merchant tailor had never had to interest himself in the actual tailoring operative; it was left to the journeyman to employ whatever labour he needed at whatever rates he chose. The merchant tailors had no knowledge of the wages earned by the journeymens' employees. In principle they had no objection to eliminating sub-contracting but they were not satisfied that members of the BTU were,

...capable of undertaking the scientific production of garments of varying qualities and descriptions to meet the needs of their customers....In view of the fact that the Journeymen Tailors...are the real craftsmen in the trade and are trained experts, it is obvious that they cannot be cut out of the Industry.<sup>52</sup>

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50. Memorandum..., p.7.

51. Memorandum..., p.4.

52. Memorandum..., pp.6,7.



The memorandum suggested that "co-operative workrooms" be established for journeymen who worked for the smaller tailoring firms which could not afford their own workshops. These co-operative workrooms would be registered under the Factories Act. No suggestion was made as to how such workrooms might be financed, but this was the first, and only, constructive attempt by the merchant tailors to resolve the problems surrounding the 'modernisation' of the tailoring trade in Cape Town. The MTA later made destructive attacks on the JTA and spoke no more of their key importance. There was no single cause for this change in policy, but we will argue (see page 155 below) that it was fostered by the particular ways in which the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts were applied in the Cape tailoring trade.

Before the Wage Board visited Cape Town, the new efforts to form an industrial council had gained momentum. The Union had recruited more members<sup>53</sup> and the Wage Board had urged "the association concerned" to form an industrial council in the tailoring trade.<sup>54</sup> As Laite had predicted, the BTU had yielded to the suggestion that it take responsibility for the journeymen. Laite explained to a joint meeting of the MTA and BTU:

In the past the Journeymen Tailors had been the disturbing element. They were not a registered body and no agreement could be made with them. They would however have to be included and the employees association was now agreeable to accept them as members.<sup>55</sup>

The draft constitution was ratified and a decision was taken that neither the merchant tailors nor the Union would give oral evidence to the Wage Board as they had formed an industrial council and would shortly negotiate an agreement. The MTA had already sent the Board its Memorandum and proposed log. The first meeting

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53. Membership of the BTU was 225 in July 1926. (Pencilled note on letter from the Secretary for Labour to the Secretary BTU, 24 July 1926 S.A.B. ARB210 51465/71).

54. MTA and BTU Joint Minutes: 25 October 1926 - M3/2. This action was characteristic of the Wage Board which was strongly in favour of the organization of employers and workers.

55. MTA and BTU Joint Minutes: 25 October 1926 - M3/2. (But see footnote 66, below).

of the "Industrial Council for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry of the Cape Peninsula" was held in November 1926.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile, the JTA, thinking little of their chances of friendly acceptance by the BTU, had applied for registration under the Industrial Conciliation Act.<sup>57</sup> Their request was for registration as an employees association - the Journeymen Tailors' Union - but the Secretary of Labour thought they were in fact employers. They were thus entitled to join the MTA (if the latter agreed) or to be independently registered as an employers' organization.<sup>58</sup> The MTA and BTU were asked if they objected to the registration of the JTA. Both objected in the strongest terms.

Laite's reaction, on behalf of the MTA, is scarcely understandable in the light of the memorandum he had written to the Wage Board just three months before. There he had stressed the worth of the journeymen and stated that they were totally responsible for the employment of workers. Now he dismissed them as "individuals of a nondescript character" and their organization as "possessing no status and acting as an intermediary between employers and employees".<sup>59</sup> He wrote that the MTA was "registered, and represents the employers". He continued:

The (Industrial) Council (for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry) is engaged in negotiating an Agreement, which we hope, will result in the complete abolition of the middleman, who for purposes of his own, calls himself "The Journeyman Tailors' Union".<sup>60</sup>

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56. 'Industrial Council for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry' Minutes: 24 November 1926 - M3/2. This body was not registered.

57. Letter from the Secretary, Journeymen Tailors' Union (JTA) to the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, 27 September 1926 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

58. Letter from the Secretary for Labour to Divisional Inspector, Cape Town, 4 November 1926 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

59. Letter from Laite (MTA) to Registrar of Trade Unions and Employers' Organizations, 24 November 1926 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

60. Ibid. The MTA was now in full support of the Union's original position. The minutes of the third 'industrial council' meeting state: "The MTA had agreed that there would be a determined effort made to eliminate the Contractor who will have to decide whether he is going to be a Merchant Tailor and join the MTA, or whether he is going to be an operative and join the Union" (6 December 1926 - M3/2).

Stuart wrote an equally angry letter to the Registrar. He considered the journeymen to be "employers paying wages as other employers do and making profit in the same manner". They were not entitled to registration as the Industrial Conciliation Act did not provide for "composite unions or associations".<sup>61</sup> Faced with this opposition, the application of the JTA was shelved.

The whole question of the journeymen was now relegated to the background as the 'industrial council' became locked in conflict over the log. The struggle was focussed on the price for Lounge Coats, and so fierce were the arguments that one meeting "was abruptly broken up, both sides using language of an unfriendly character".<sup>62</sup> Stuart threatened to withdraw from the 'council' and refer the whole business to the Wage Board.<sup>63</sup> But sanity prevailed and after three months of recriminations an agreement was finally worked out. The Chairman of the MTA described the "arduous work" of negotiating the agreement to the annual general meeting, stating that,

In getting labour to agree to £1.3.0 for the making of a Lounge Coat, a great victory had been won.<sup>64</sup>

The agreement set piece-work rates of pay and followed a direction from the Wage Board that it prohibit,

...work of any description being done in the homes of the employees, or under such conditions as were considered unhygienic. In future, all tailoring work would have to be done in properly constituted workshops...<sup>65</sup>

All these negotiations on the future of the tailoring trade took place without the interests of the journeymen being represented. In view of the Union's determination that outwork and middlemen should be abolished, it is not surprising that the JTA had not

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61. Stuart (BTU) to Secretary for Labour, 22 November 1926 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

62. W. Freestone, Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, to Secretary for Labour, 14 January 1927 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

63. 'Industrial Council for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry' Minutes: 13 December 1926 - M3/2.

64. MTA Minutes: 9 May 1927 - M3/1.

65. Ibid.

joined the BTU.<sup>66</sup> But the middlemen still existed. The bulk of the work of merchant tailors was still contracted out to them. They were the direct employers, the wage payers, of many members of Stuart's union. If the agreement were gazetted, journeymen would be bound to pay wages settled between the BTU and the MTA. Simply because of its registration as an employers' organization under the Industrial Conciliation Act, the MTA - in reality an interfering third party - was able to masquerade as the employer.

In April 1927, the agreement was sent off to the Wage Board for approval. It formed part of a composite agreement negotiated between the parties to the new, unregistered, Industrial Council for the Garment Manufacturing Industries into which the bespoke tailoring 'industrial council' had been absorbed. The new council had been established after the clothing factory owners had failed to organize themselves a suitable union to participate in their proposed industrial council for the clothing industry. They then asked Stuart to form a union.<sup>67</sup> Stuart agreed if he could simply expand the BTU to include factory workers and bring the enlarged union into an Industrial Council that would cover all branches of clothing manufacturing in Cape Town. The new body thus comprised the (unregistered) "Operative Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula" and employer representatives from the retail bespoke tailors, the wholesale bespoke factories and the manufacturers of shirts and pyjamas, ready-mades and waterproof garments, grouped in the two employer organizations, the MTA and CWCMA.<sup>68</sup>

The merchant tailors were generally satisfied with the arrangement. They were now closely associated with factory owners, who were employers beyond any doubt, and a single industrial council would spread the costs of administration more widely.<sup>69</sup> Their

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66. The exclusion of the journeymen from the BTU, despite the latter's agreement to absorb them, was raised at an 'industrial council' meeting:

'Mr. Stuart said the difficulty arose because Journeymen Tailors desired to continue outwork. To this the Union was diametrically opposed as it meant the continuance of a system whereby a certain class of workman occupied the dual position of employer and employee'. ('Industrial Council for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry' Minutes: 9 March 1927 - M3/2).

67. See Chapter 4, pp.167-8; 173-5 below.

68. 'Industrial Council for the Garment Manufacturing Industries' Minutes: 30 April 1927 - M4/1.

69. MTA Minutes: 2 February 1927, joint meeting with CWCMA - M3/1.

outlook on the future was at its brightest. They had every hope that "the agreement mutually arrived at by the employers and employees in the bespoke tailoring industry would be accepted"<sup>70</sup> by the Wage Board. The Board had met with the 'Industrial Council' and had not seemed "particularly concerned with bespoke tailoring".<sup>71</sup>

### 3 The Wage Board Pulls a Fast One

The merchant tailors were shaken out of their complacency by two events. Firstly, there were rumours that the members of the Union had repudiated the 'mutually acceptable' log. Laite,

...stated that he had been informed that the employees' representatives on the Industrial Council had met with a good deal of opposition and a fair amount of criticism when meeting the body who had elected them.<sup>72</sup>

Workers had joined the Union on the promise of higher wages. They were not prepared for the long delay before these came into effect. The Union was prepared to wait for a Wage Board determination or industrial council agreement to be gazetted before it tried to enforce higher wages. The workers became impatient, and their protests forced the Union to withdraw from the 'industrial council'.<sup>73</sup>

Secondly, the Wage Board did not quietly accept the wage agreement sent in by the 'industrial council'. It asked the MTA to comment on a document it had drawn up suggesting "a new system for clothing manufacturing to allow higher wages and more output".<sup>74</sup> The merchant tailors all agreed that this was "unworkable". They would give the Wage Board "every assistance" but "not...depart from the terms and conditions laid down in the agreement one iota".<sup>75</sup>

The Wage Board proceeded with its investigation, completely ignoring the 'industrial council' agreement. In December 1927

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70. MTA Minutes: 9 May 1927, annual general meeting - M3/1.

71. Ibid.

72. MTA Minutes: 30 May 1927 - M3/1.

73. CWCMA Minutes: 12 December 1927, joint meeting with MTA - M2/1. This is dealt with in Chapter 4.

74. MTA Minutes: 30 May 1927 - M3/1. The suggestions were not minuted.

75. Ibid.

it circulated its draft recommendation for comment.<sup>76</sup> The Board had taken more than a year to produce its first report on bespoke tailoring. This was partly because it was delayed by pressure of work, but it was "mainly the inherent complications in the tailoring industry itself" which held up the report. The investigation covered all the main urban areas of South Africa and involved visits to 176 tailoring establishments.<sup>77</sup>

The Board found all the traditional evils of the tailoring trade - outwork, low wages, unhygienic workrooms - although there was a great variation between towns and between shops. In view of the poor conditions, very few young people were becoming tailors or receiving proper training. Virtually all white tailors had learnt their trade overseas. If conditions were improved there would be scope for the employment "of a considerable number of youths".<sup>78</sup> The Board noted a considerable difference in wage levels between the Witwatersrand and other areas. Many employers stated that wages were too low but were forced down to these levels by the competition of firms who paid sweated wages.<sup>79</sup> There were bitter complaints that many up country people had their suits made by retail bespoke tailors in Cape Town where rates of pay were specially low. Firms such as Hepworths, Stuttafords and Garlicks employed travellers who visited country areas and collected orders. In view of this competition between towns, the Board commented that,

...the standard of living, and, therefore, the class of workers coming into the industry, are likely to be determined by the standard of living of those who are being paid very low wages in Cape Town.<sup>80</sup>

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76. CWCMA Minutes: 19 December 1927, joint meeting with MTA - M2/1; Wage Board Report: Bespoke Tailoring Industry, 7 March 1928 in Social & Industrial Review: Special Edition 1 (16), 22 June 1928.

77. Wage Board Report, 23 February 1928, op.cit., paragraphs 2, 6, 7.

78. Ibid., paragraph 14.

79. Ibid., paragraph 17.

80. Ibid., paragraph 18.

Nevertheless the Board reported to the Minister that it could not propose wages which would allow all employees "to support themselves in accordance with civilised habits of life"; for to do so at that time would cause unemployment and hardship to both employers and employees.<sup>81</sup>

The Wage Board made two major proposals for restructuring the tailoring trade, both of which struck at the core of the existence of most tailoring establishments. The first was the abolition of outwork and the second a limitation on the system of piece-work. Outwork was the chief difficulty in the way of inspectors enforcing prescribed wages, hours of work and working conditions. The suggestion was that indoor workshops be made compulsory.<sup>82</sup> Equally threatening to many tailors was the recommendation of a flat rate minimum wage. The Board argued that time rates had been successfully adapted by several firms and that piece rates were wasteful. Employers had no incentive to regulate the amount of work given out and workers were often kept idle waiting for work. The system put employers in a stronger position because it led to competition between workers.

It may be that if a system based on minimum time wages is introduced, the industry will have to become more compact than it is at present, but those who remain in it will be generally fully occupied, whereas today a considerable number during a great portion of the year are employed only for a short time each week.<sup>83</sup>

The Board did not want to prohibit piecework entirely. Workers could be paid on a piece-work basis, provided they were guaranteed payment of a minimum time wage.

This was of little consolation to the Cape Town merchant tailors who objected both to size of the minimum wage and to the removal of the workers' incentive to work hard, which they believed was entailed in piece-work. The recommendation did not purport to question the existence of journeymen tailors. A middleman

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81. Wage Board Report, 23 February 1928, op.cit., paragraph 36.

82. Ibid., paragraphs 11, 21, 33.

83. Ibid., paragraph 15.

or contractor could continue to operate as such provided his establishment was a registered factory or workshop.

His services will be available for the merchant tailor who does not want to set up a workshop of his own.<sup>84</sup>

The Board intended that each area should reach its own decision on the role of journeymen. However the requirements for setting up factories was beyond the means of most journeymen in Cape Town. Ending outwork would mean their extinction unless they were well enough organized to secure co-operative workrooms.

Laite prepared a memorandum of objections to the draft recommendation on behalf of the MTA and the wholesale bespoke factory section of the CWCMA.<sup>85</sup> He wrote that if the Wage Board failed

...to realise the serious position in which the industry will be placed if its present draft recommendation becomes law, manufacturers can see no alternative before them but a restriction in operations and the placing of a large number of employees on the streets.<sup>86</sup>

The main areas for complaint were in the definition of a wholesale bespoke tailoring factory and, most emphatically, in the recommendation of a flat minimum wage.<sup>87</sup>

The Wage Board was deaf to the appeals of the Cape tailors. It did not receive many critical comments on its draft recommendation - the Transvaal Merchant Tailors' Association even wrote to express its "entire agreement".<sup>88</sup> The recommendation was ga-

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84. Circular letter from the Wage Board, accompanying the draft recommendation for bespoke tailoring. Reproduced in paragraph 1 of Wage Board Report, 7 March 1928, op.cit.

85. Wholesale bespoke tailoring was included in the report and draft recommendation. The Board proposed that the same minimum wages apply as in the readymade clothing industry. Higher rates could be negotiated by the Union if it was able. Many MTA meetings were devoted to discussions on the relationship between wholesale and retail bespoke tailoring. Members of the MTA did not complain of competition from the wholesale bespoke factories and even supported an appeal to the Wage Board that the factories should be allowed to give try-ons.

86. Laite (CCI) to Wage Board, January 1928 - M2/1.

87. Memorandum of Objections to Draft Recommendation Submitted by Wage Board for Bespoke Tailoring Industry, December 1927 - M2/1.

88. Wage Board Report, 7 March 1928, op.cit., paragraphs 2, 4.



zatted for objections in June 1928.<sup>89</sup>

The MTA held a special general meeting to decide on a course of action.

...(I)t was unanimously agreed that the industry could not possibly operate under terms set out in the proposed Determination...<sup>90</sup>

and that an attempt should be made to persuade the Minister to accept the wages negotiated by the 'industrial council'.<sup>91</sup> A fund was set up to pay the expenses of a deputation that would speak to the Minister in Pretoria. The Chairman of the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula (GWU-CP) accompanied the MTA representatives and supported their protests.<sup>92</sup> However, the recommendation was published, virtually unaltered, as Wage Determination No.24 in December 1928. The determination was to take effect in January 1929.<sup>93</sup>

#### 4 The Last Fling of the Journeymen

As can be imagined, all these proceedings were viewed with even greater alarm by the JTA. The journeymen had been excluded from the 'industrial council' and lacked the resources of both the CCI and CFLU in obtaining information about the intentions of the Wage Board.<sup>94</sup> The JTA had given evidence to the Wage Board

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89. Government Gazette 22 June 1928.

90. MTA Minutes: 3 July 1928 - the meeting included "others engaged in the Trade" - M3/1.

91. Faced with the delay in the appearance of the Wage Determination, the GWU-CP had again endorsed the 'industrial council' agreement (CWCMA Minutes: 12 December 1927, joint meeting with MTA - M2/1). Of course, the Minister was not entitled to incorporate the 'industrial council' wage rates in a wage determination unless the Wage Board specifically recommended this. The MTA's request that the Minister should withdraw the proposed determination and "replace it with the bespoke tailoring log appearing in the Industrial Council agreement"\* was thus certain to fail (\*MTA Minutes: 9 July 1928 - M3/1).

92. MTA Minutes: 10 October 1928 - M3/1.

93. Government Gazette 8 December 1928.

94. William Freestone, formerly Divisional Inspector of Labour and a long time official of the CFLU, had joined the Wage Board early in 1928.

and had submitted objections to the recommendation,<sup>95</sup> but the Board had not specified what their future role would be. While the intention of merchant tailors and the Union was that journeymen should be phased out in the future, they still existed and needed to know where they would fit into whatever system of statutory wage regulation was finally adopted.

In November 1928, Mr. M. Herman, the secretary of the JTA, wrote to the Secretary for Labour and asked that the JTA be registered.<sup>96</sup> The Registrar suggested that the Divisional Inspector of Labour in Cape Town encourage the MTA and JTA to unite as this had worked satisfactorily in Johannesburg.<sup>97</sup> Charles Playfair,

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95. Their objections suggest they were still plagued by confusion as to their status. The JTA, whose members would have to pay operatives, objected that £5.10 per week was too little for a skilled male tailor. They asked for the minimum to be £7.10. (Wage Board Report, Bespoke Tailoring Industry, 10 October 1928). When they again applied to join the MTA they were accused of having given evidence "from the employees point of view" (MTA Minutes: 4 December 1928, joint meeting with JTA - M3/1).

96. Letter from Herman (JTA) to the Secretary for Labour, 24 November 1928. S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

97. Just how different conditions in Johannesburg were from those in Cape Town, may be judged from this summary of events: The journeymen (master tailors) in Johannesburg were strongly organized. The Transvaal Merchant Tailors' Association did not object to their registration.

'The next step was that the newly registered Master Tailors' Association applied for membership of the Industrial Council for the Bespoke Tailoring Industry, Witwatersrand. Before any decision could, however, be reached, the Transvaal Merchant Tailors' Association decided to dissolve, the principal reason being the Department's inability to legalize an Agreement fixing contract prices as between the merchant and the master tailor. The Master Tailors' Association thereupon agreed with the Witwatersrand Tailors' Association to form a new Council. On further consideration, the Merchant Tailors decided that their interests were so closely bound up with those of the Master Tailors that they could not very well remain outside of the Council, the result being that the Constitution of the Master Tailors' Association was widened so as to permit of Merchant Tailors being admitted to membership. The employers' organization is now styled "The Bespoke Tailoring Employers' Association." '

(Letter from the Registrar of Trade Unions to Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, 31 October 1928. S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79).

an Industrial Inspector, accordingly arranged a meeting between the two bodies.

Despite an initial "strained feeling" between them, negotiations began on amalgamation.<sup>98</sup> The merchant tailors hoped that by following the lead of the Registrar, they might get prompt recognition of an industrial council and thus "remove control of the Industry from the Wage Board".<sup>99</sup> Laite wrote to Pretoria asking for the determination to lie dormant as they were about to form an industrial council for the retail bespoke tailoring industry.<sup>100</sup>

Proposals were drafted for the formation of "The Cape Western Tailoring Employers' Association" by a sub-committee which included five journeymen.<sup>101</sup> But the majority of journeymen thought the conditions of membership "too harsh"<sup>102</sup> and the proposals were rejected by a general meeting of the JTA.<sup>103</sup> The MTA asked for too much. The proposals excluded from membership all journeymen with fewer than two employees, and would thus force the JTA to split. Under the Wage Board determination, journeymen could take in work from the public in slack periods; the MTA set as a condition that journeymen should only take work from recognised merchant tailors. They rejected the journeymens' request that merchant tailors only give work to members of the JTA sub-section.<sup>104</sup>

The JTA's non-acceptance of the amalgamation proposals was accompanied by a total breakdown in negotiations with the MTA. The wage determination was to come into operation on 21 January

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98. Memorandum from C. Playfair (Industrial Inspector) to the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, 5 December 1928. S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

99. MTA Minutes: 9 January 1929 - M3/1.

100. Ibid.

101. MTA Minutes: 15 January 1929, meeting of JTA and MTA representatives - M3/1.

102. Letter from Herman (JTA) to the Secretary for Labour, 21 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

103. MTA Minutes: 23 January 1929, emergency meeting - M3/1.

104. MTA Minutes: 15 January 1929, meeting of JTA and MTA representatives - M3/1.

1929 and the journeymen would be expected to pay the increased wages. To cover these new costs, the JTA had, in December, demanded increases of between 50 and 100 percent on contract prices.<sup>105</sup>

The merchant tailors had rejected these demands. They told the journeymen to ignore the new regulations as they were "acting on reliable information"<sup>106</sup> that the determination had been suspended. This was not so. It was clear, said Herman, that the merchant tailors,

...even want us to assist them in evading all responsibilities and make us for the scapegoats.<sup>107</sup>

The day before the determination was to come into force, a general meeting of journeymen voted to go on strike. They would take in no more work until the merchant tailors complied with their demands.<sup>108</sup>

The Department of Labour in Cape Town first hoped to resolve the dispute by aiding the rapid formation of an industrial council to administer the determination.<sup>109</sup> This line of action was supported by the GWU-CP.<sup>110</sup> But once the merchant tailors were informed that the determination could not "lie dormant" while an industrial council agreement was drafted, they lost interest in the formation of a council. In addition the CWCMA no longer favoured an industrial council and thus the running costs would fall on the bespoke tailoring industry alone. The merchant tailors decided to have no further negotiations with the JTA. Each tailor would deal

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105. The demands were for "50% increase on the present prices now paid for coats", 75% on vests and 100% on trousers. (Letter from JTA to MTA, 16 December 1928, reproduced in MTA Minutes: 19 December 1928 - M3/1).

106. Letter from Herman to the Minister of Labour, 1 February 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79; Herman quoted in The Cape Argus 24 January 1929.

107. Letter from Herman (JTA) to the Secretary for Labour, 21 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79. He continued: "...we want to be registered so that our Association can grow and we want representation on any Council that will no doubt be formed".

108 JTA Circular Letter to All Merchant Tailors, 21 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

109. Wire from the Department of Labour, Cape Town, to the Secretary for Labour, 22 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

110. MTA Minutes: 23 January 1929 - M3/1.

with his own journeymen to work out an acceptable rate.<sup>111</sup>

The strike disrupted the tailoring trade for a week and affected about 300 journeymen and their assistants. Newspaper reports mainly reflected the views of the merchant tailors but all noted and reported that the wage determination was at the root of the trouble.<sup>112</sup>

The JTA made every effort to bring the dispute to an end. When the merchant tailors said they had rejected the demands for percentage increases because there was "no definite rate on which the increase can be demanded"<sup>113</sup>, the JTA produced a detailed log based on the higher wage costs.<sup>114</sup> The merchant tailors did not even discuss this proposal.<sup>115</sup> They had now decided that the JTA was not representative of all the journeymen and that "to deal with an unrepresentative body would serve no good purpose".<sup>116</sup> Certainly, the JTA was not fully representative, neither was it closely organized.<sup>117</sup> But the weakness of the Association was largely due to the way that it had been denied recognition by the government and excluded from all wage negotiations for the preceding two years.<sup>118</sup> Most journeymen saw no advantage in supporting the Association and continued to arrange contract prices on an individual basis with merchant tailors.

The disadvantages thrust on the JTA by their non-recognition were stressed by Playfair in a wire to Pretoria as the strike started. He urged the registration of the JTA and asked for a

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111. MTA Minutes: 23 January 1929 - M3/1.

112. The Cape Argus 23, 24 January 1929; The Cape Times 23, 24, 25 January 1929.

113. Laite quoted in The Cape Argus 23 January 1929.

114. The Cape Times 25 January 1929.

115. MTA Minutes: 25 January 1929 - M3/1.

116. Ibid.

117. Letter in The Cape Argus 26 January 1929 from "Thimble"; letter from the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, to the Secretary for Labour, 11 February 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

118. The strength of the MTA and CWU were based in a large measure on the legal status and legal powers which they had by virtue of being registered. See p.155, below.

senior inspector to be sent to arrange an industrial council.<sup>119</sup> The Secretary for Labour replied that registration was impossible unless the JTA was "definitely representative of the interests of employers or employees".<sup>120</sup> Playfair sent a brusque wire in response:

Surely position is farcical when the actual employers are deemed unregistrable in the sector of an industry where they hold the field and do nine tenths of the whole work....Quite unfair to support selfish interests of merchants who for this purpose are certainly not employers.<sup>121</sup>

This concise statement of the situation jolted the Secretary for Labour into agreeing that the JTA could be registered if the MTA was not "sufficiently representative" to absorb it.<sup>122</sup>

The MTA was again informed of the possibility that the JTA might be registered. They were naturally very opposed to the registration of another employers' association, especially one that might oust them from their influential position as 'the employers' in the tailoring trade. Stephens, now Chairman of the MTA, warned

...that if the Journeymen Tailors' Association succeeded in the endeavour to be officially recognised, then the merchant tailors would be placed in the hands of these journeymen tailors.<sup>123</sup>

Laite wrote to the Secretary for Labour stating that the journeymen,

...are merely the employees of members of Merchant Tailors' Association, and whilst it is true that some of

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119. Playfair (Department of Labour, Cape Town) to Secretary for Labour (wire), 22 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

120. Letter from the Secretary for Labour to the Divisional Inspector, Cape Town, 23 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79 (my emphasis). The gist of this letter was contained in a wire of 22 January 1929.

121. Wire from the Department of Labour, Cape Town to the Secretary for Labour, 23 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

122. Postscript to Secretary for Labour to Divisional Inspector, Cape Town, 23 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

123. MTA Minutes: 25 January 1929 - M3/1.

them employ members of the Garment Workers' Union, others  
do not...<sup>124</sup>

Any journeyman who recognised himself as an employer could apply  
to the MTA for membership.

Herman was indignant that the MTA should have been asked  
for its views on the registration of his organization.

- Sir [he wrote], it is like asking a cat for some milk  
or butter.<sup>125</sup>

While Playfair continued his efforts to bind the Cape Town tailor-  
ing trade into the structures of the Industrial Conciliation Act,  
journeymen began to take in work once more. Their strike was  
never officially called off by the JTA which was further weakened  
by this defeat. The MTA drew up a log of their own which they  
applied unilaterally, each tailor dealing with individual journey-  
men.<sup>126</sup>

The JTA had to confront the MTA when at its weakest. Member-  
ship had fallen from seventy in 1926 to forty in 1929.<sup>127</sup> The  
wage determination placed the responsibility for the payment of  
the new wage rates onto the journeymen while the merchant tailors  
had refused to negotiate higher contract prices with them. In  
consequence, many journeymen dismissed their employees.<sup>128</sup> Playfair  
found only sixteen members of the JTA who qualified as 'employers'  
under the definition of the Industrial Conciliation Act. He

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124. Letter from Laite (MTA) to the Secretary for Labour, 25 January  
1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

125. Herman (JTA) to Minister of Labour, 1 February 1929 S.A.B.  
ARB240 51465/79.

126. Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town to Secretary for  
Labour, 11 February 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79; MTA Minutes:  
25 January 1929 - M3/1.

127. Letter from the Secretary JTA to the Secretary for Labour,  
18 October 1926; letter from the Divisional Inspector of  
Labour, Cape Town to the Secretary for Labour, 11 February  
1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79. In the latter report, Playfair  
estimates that 94 journeymen took work from members of the  
MTA in Cape Town proper. "Many more" worked between Cape  
Town and Simon's Town.

128. Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town to Secretary for  
Labour, 11 February 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

thought that the determination would cause more merchant tailors to start their own workshops and this would further reduce the number of journeymen tailors. Nevertheless he recommended that the JTA be registered. Most significantly, he was not impressed by the representivity of the MTA. This had a membership of thirty-nine and, according to Laite, included all the firms that "mattered"; but, wrote Playfair,

...it is doubtful whether the Association is 50 per cent representative of the Merchant Tailors in the area it purports to serve.<sup>129</sup>

He doubted whether

...either Association could satisfy the Minister... that it is sufficiently representative for the formation of a Council.<sup>130</sup>

The MTA still refused to negotiate with the JTA. Despite the continued objection of Laite and the MTA, the Registrar offered registration to the JTA in respect of,

...persons who perform tailoring work on contract for Merchant Tailors and who complete such work outside the Merchant Tailor's premises.<sup>131</sup>

Herman submitted a draft constitution,<sup>132</sup> but by October 1929 the JTA no longer existed. R. Beattie, the Divisional Inspector of Labour in Cape Town, wrote that

The Association appears to have collapsed, and the Secretary reports that, as a result of the lengthy negotiations, it has been found impossible to maintain the interest of the parties.<sup>133</sup>

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129. Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town to Secretary for Labour, 11 February 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

130. Ibid.

131. Letter from the Registrar to the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town 28 May 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79. The name of the JTA was to change to the Master Tailors' Association.

132. Letter from the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town to the Registrar, 6 August 1928 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

133. Letter from the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town to the Secretary for Labour, 4 October 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.



Handwritten on this letter is an ironic comment by the Registrar:

It is a poor Union (sic) that must look to registration for its existence.

### 5 Lament for the Journeymen

This epigram can be applied with some justice to those rivals of the JTA; the BTU and the MTA. Both had ceased effective operation by the end of 1929, both were in the first instance children of the legislation. Neither had any claim to importance beyond that conferred on them by law as the recognised employer and employee organizations. During its entire life the MTA restricted its scope to matters concerned with the Wage Board or industrial councils. It did not, like the CWCMA, explore other areas for joint action.

This story of the journeymen tailors shows how the new industrial legislation enhanced the position of sharp brokers such as Laite and Stuart. That they did not succeed in all their efforts was due more to the complexity of the tailoring trades than to the efficacy of the legislation. It seems likely (as was later the case with the garment workers) that industrial councils with as little representivity as those in the Cape tailoring trade in the 1920's were registered and achieved the effects Laite and Stuart desired.<sup>134</sup> The need for Wage Board representations and industrial council administration created a role for the CFLU and additional functions for the CCI. It was not only union bureaucrats that the new legislation spawned.

The story of the JTA confronts us with more than the fatuity of its existence. It illustrates the inappropriateness of both the Wage and Industrial Conciliation Acts to the tailoring trade. The application of both laws undermined the tailoring trade. It challenged the archaic structure of the trade and applied enormous pressure to eradicate the evils of sweating but in a way which did not allow tailoring to reform itself.

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134. For instance in the Biscuit and Baking & Confectionery industries - see S.A.B. file ARB 1058/27. More study would be needed to confirm this.

The rigid structures of the Industrial Conciliation Act were totally at odds with the intricacies of the tailoring trade. The Act recognised only 'employers' and 'employees' and did not encompass the wide variation in relations of production that existed. This led to a ridiculous situation. In theory an agreement under the Act should be negotiated between the direct workers and their direct employers - in the majority of cases the latter were journeymen. However, the merchant tailors were the first organized group in the Cape tailoring trade and they were able to secure early registration for the MTA as the organization of employers. They then interested themselves in setting or influencing the wages which they were not responsible for paying. It is tempting to suggest that what the journeymen most lacked was a partisan broker like Laite who might have organized them into an affiliate of his CCI and convinced the Department of Labour to recognise this body as the employers organization in 1926. But this could never have been. The definition of 'employer' in the Industrial Conciliation Act only covered people who employed more than one worker. This excluded a great proportion of the journeymen tailors in Cape Town.<sup>135</sup> (It also excluded small tailors from membership of the MTA).

The MTA exploited their privileged position to the full. This was not founded in the law alone but they used the law to retain and reinforce their economic dominance over the journeymen. By controlling the 'employers' organization' they were able to ensure that contract prices between them and the journeymen were never legislated. It was obviously important to them to prevent such a solution to the improvement of conditions in the trade. If the government was intent on raising wages in tailoring, the least threatening rise to the merchant tailors was in the wages of the journeymen's assistants. Minimum wages for operatives would not eliminate the price-reducing competition between journeymen on which merchant tailors thrived. A degree of wage uniformity might even be beneficial in that it eliminated competition from

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135. Using the earlier estimates (see footnote 127 above) that 94 of the approximately 300 tailoring workers in Cape Town proper were journeymen, a majority might have had fewer than two assistants.

other merchant tailors using sweated labour. It did not really matter whether these minimum standards were set by the Wage Board or an industrial council. The merchant tailors still avoided any responsibility for raising standards and could freely make scapegoats of the journeymen when complaints were made about sweating in the trade.

Neither the Wage Board nor the industrial council was able to recognise the structural weakness of the journeymen with respect to the merchant tailors. The attitude of the Department of Labour was that,

...it is their (the journeymen's) business to see that they do not accept work from the merchant tailors at rates which will not allow them to pay their employees the legal wage rates. Theirs is the responsibility of complying with the law if they employ persons covered by the Determination.<sup>136</sup>

This view was endorsed by the Wage Board in its refusal to recommend any steps to regulate contract prices. This was an essential ingredient of any true reform of the tailoring trade in Cape Town. The realities of the trade did not give journeymen the power to enforce the contract prices they needed to be paid if they, in turn, were to pay their assistants and make a living themselves. Competition between journeymen ensured that no strong unity was possible against the merchant tailors. The Wage Board and Department of Labour had to take account of this imbalance in power between the merchant tailors and the journeymen or their laws would fail to improve conditions in the trade. As it was, they acted in ways which further weakened the journeymen and made them still more vulnerable to the will of the merchant tailors.

No one was more aware of the weakness and vulnerability of the journeymen than the merchant tailors. And they exploited this weakness to the full in the three years of wrangling over the regulation of the trade. Their policy towards the journeymen,

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136. Letter from the Chief Inspector of Labour (Ivan Walker) to the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town 13 February 1929 S.A.B. ARB240 51465/79.

always opportunist and at every step moulded by the new legislation, was shortsighted and could bring advantages only in the short term. In the long term, enforced minimum wages for operatives and minimum standards for workshops would tend to eliminate journeymen. Under normal conditions, the tailoring trade was highly competitive. Journeymen were pushed to rely on lowering wages, intensifying labour, lengthening working hours, using family help and working at home. The removal of all these sources of marginal profit put the squeeze on the individual journeyman tailor who could exploit himself to the limit without breaking any law.

It was in the nature of any enforced wage regulation under the new laws that the journeymen would bear the brunt of the hardship. It is true that all the evils of the needle trades were manifested in the sub-contracting system, but this system was based as much on the merchant tailors as their unfortunate journeymen who, in Cape Town, came to be singled out for harassment by the new industrial laws.

But the prescriptions of the Wage Board were not enforced by the Department of Labour or by the GWU-CP. The former lacked a sufficient staff of inspectors to monitor the determinations. The GWU-CP was only formally an organization of tailoring workers - after 1928 it existed in name only. It did not recruit workers or settle their complaints. The pronouncements of the Wage Board had, at most, an indirect influence on the continuing decline of the tailoring trades. Its periodic determinations and reports stressed its wish to end all outwork and thus contributed to the tailors' sense of insecurity. But the main reason for the decline of tailoring lay in the increasing output of clothing factories. The Wage Board commented in 1935:

The signs seen during previous investigations that work in the retail section of the clothing trade was decreasing and that readymade and factory made garments are being bought in increasing quantities instead of bespoke tailored garments, were more in evidence in this than in any previous investigation. In the Union during the last few years, the position has been similar to that reported in Great Britain, America and France,

where the retail tailoring trade is dying a natural death...The picture of a steadily dwindling trade is one which faces most merchant tailors.<sup>137</sup>

In Cape Town it seems that there was an absolute decline in the number of white tailors<sup>138</sup> but that coloured, specifically Malay, tailors resisted more effectively both the dictates of the Wage Board and the economic pressure placed on them by the factories. In 1931 the Wage Board stated:

...In Cape Town the competition is between European and Malay employees. In this competition the European is gradually being beaten and his numbers are getting less and less.<sup>139</sup>

Malay tailors simply ignored the provisions of the first wage determination which outlawed work at home or sub-contracting to tailors who did not have registered workshops. When a second, revised wage determination in 1932<sup>140</sup> sought to enforce the same provisions a Malay Tailors' Union sprang into existence. Such a law would "entail untold misery and hardship among Moslem tailors".<sup>141</sup> The secretary of the union, S. Dollie, at a mass meeting called on all members not to register even if they were able to comply with the regulations. They should remember their friends who were unable to do so. Dollie asked,

...Which of the tailors present were able to carry into effect the conditions laid down in the act? He made bold to say, not one.<sup>142</sup>

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137. Wage Board Report: Garment Making Trades, 12 April 1935 Annexure 99-1936, paragraphs 73, 78.

138. I found no statistical sources that allowed an estimate of the changing composition of the tailoring trade in Cape Town.

139. Wage Board Report: Bespoke Tailoring and Clothing Manufacturing Industries, 23 October 1931 Annexure 82-1931-2.

140. Wage Determination No.44.

141. The Sun 28 October 1932.

142. Ibid. (Dollie was a London-trained pharmacist and the proprietor of the Castle Bridge Pharmacy. He involved himself in local politics and was for some years a member of the Divisional Council).

Another speaker said:

'Any man who registers will be a traitor to the cause'.  
...There were very few Moslems in Cape Town or in the whole of South Africa who were able to satisfy the letter of the law. 'If you register, you are putting a rope around your own neck'.<sup>143</sup>

In the face of an inadequate system of enforcement, this effort to "defeat the Determination"<sup>144</sup> was a success. The Wage Board commented in 1938:

The major portion of the workers in the retail trade at Capetown are Malays who are opposed to working under factory conditions and this probably accounts for the fact that the outwork system is more prevalent at this than at any other centre in the Union...When Determination No.44 was first promulgated efforts were made to enforce the provision which requires all work to be performed in a registered factory, but...this attempt failed with the result that the Determination has not, in this respect, been enforced effectively for some considerable time. An organization of Malay tailors, apparently all working under the contract system objected strongly to the inclusion of any provision which would compel them to work in factories.<sup>145</sup>

Ten years after the first wage determination for the tailoring trades, the Wage Act had failed to secure the elimination of outwork. Wage Board reports during this period had repeatedly marked this as the essential condition for ending sweated conditions. All the Board's attempts to deal with outwork were "hampered by little enforcement".<sup>146</sup> By 1938 the Board commented that although,

...the position of the workers, and in fact of many employers, is distressing...it is to be regretted that

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143. The Sun 28 October 1932. Also see The Cape Times 30 May 1933; 14 December 1933.

144. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 137.

145. Wage Board Report: Garment Making Trades, 21 February 1938 Annexure 190-193, paragraph 116.

146. Wage Board Report: 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 85.

so little can be done under the Wage Act to improve matters without the risk of repercussions harmful to the trade itself.<sup>147</sup>

To the Malay tailors this 1938 report must have appeared as a breath of realism after past Wage Board harassment. But it also signified a retreat from the idealism which had been a feature of Wage Board reports and policies in the first decade of its operation. The Board no longer saw itself as an instrument of progress and economic justice. The 1935 report stated categorically that wage determinations in the bespoke tailoring trade were of little use unless outwork was ended.<sup>148</sup> The 1938 report put forward suggestions to control rather than outlaw outwork.<sup>149</sup>

The actions of the Wage Board either had little effect on the tailoring trade in Cape Town or marginally hastened its decline. The factory section of the clothing industry in Cape Town on the other hand, was transformed and strengthened by the influence of the Wage Board. It is to this branch of the clothing industry that we will next direct our attention.

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147. Wage Board Report: 21 February 1938 op.cit., paragraph 99.

148. Wage Board Report: 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 91.

149. Wage Board Report: 21 February 1938 op.cit., paragraph 100.

## CHAPTER IV

BEING CRUEL TO BE KINDThe Wage Board in the Cape Clothing Industry  
1925-1934

...The introduction of the Wage Act, which should be carefully distinguished from the Conciliation Act, was intended to apply only to classes of employees incapable of organization working under sweated and otherwise unfavourable conditions and thus unable to benefit from the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act. The Department therefore aims consistently at emphasising the application of the Conciliation Act and limiting the Wage Act to the unfavoured classes of employment; recognizing that perhaps the greatest service which it can render to industry is the galvanic influence it has had and may continue to have upon laggard organization, exercising useful pressure in the direction of the establishment of Industrial Councils.

- C.W. Cousins, Secretary for Labour, 1927<sup>1</sup>

gal'vanise. v.t. to confer a false vitality upon...

- Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary

It was the Wage Act that induced the sudden formation of the Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers' Association (CWCMA) in August 1925.

The very existence of the Wage Board filled the Cape clothing manufacturers with dread. The spectre was raised of this 'third party', with no special knowledge of the clothing industry, dictating uneconomic wages and working conditions for factory workers. Their fears seemed doubly justified once the Board was set to work in their industry and recommended wage levels which, none doubted, would bring immediate ruin if implemented.

For three years, the main aim of the CWCMA was to secure the clothing industry against the depredations of the Wage Board. To pre-empt a Wage Board investigation, the manufacturers first registered their organization and then tried to form an industrial

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1. Minutes of a Conference between the Native Affairs Department and Native Affairs Commission, the Department of Labour and the Wage Board on the Regulation of Native Interests in Industry, 25-7 October 1927, p.5 S.A.B. ARB1103.



council. But before they could organize a union for their workers, the Minister had asked the Wage Board to report on the clothing industry. The CWCMA wrote to suggest that the chairman of the Board "concentrate his efforts upon occupations less able to take care of themselves".<sup>2</sup> When the Board persisted with its investigation the manufacturers launched a desperate publicity campaign "to save the industry".<sup>3</sup> The Wage Board later commented:-

In no industry have such strenuous efforts been made to prevent the Board's recommendations resulting in a determination.<sup>4</sup>

The panic of the manufacturers is understandable. The Pact government had come to power promising a new deal for white workers. This would mean general wage rises if these workers were not to be undercut by competition from cheaper black workers. The clothing industry was beginning to thrive under the new protective customs tariffs. But the government had always linked protection with the payment of civilized wages.<sup>5</sup> The Wage Act was seen by the CCI as the means by which the government was going to force higher wages on the struggling manufacturers. None doubted that the Wage Board could enforce its will on industry. South African manufacturers were used to being bullied - by the government, by the mines, by merchant capital. No-one doubted that the government could enforce civilized standards, even though it might cripple industry in the process. Before the Wage Board existed in reality, it existed in the imagination of manufacturers as a hungry-headed Scylla which would scoff up their profits. Had they escaped the Charybdis of foreign competition only to fall prey to the Scylla of the Wage Board?

The manufacturers were too weak economically and organization-

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2. Letter from Laite to Minister of Labour, 8 March 1926 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.
  3. CWCMA Minutes: 19 March 1928 - M2/1.
  4. Wage Board Report: Work of the Board for the three years ended February 1928, paragraph 304. Annexure 112-1929, 2nd Session.
  - 5 See footnote 184 below.

ally to defeat any determined opponent. But they could manoeuvre, they could plead, they could protest, they could obstruct; and this opposition would be more effective if manufacturers presented a united front. So before the Wage Board did anything, it inspired the manufacturers to organize.

Provision for the organization of employers was made in the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act, which also seemed to provide a way of escape from the Wage Board. For, if the workers were also organized in a registered trade union, an industrial council could be formed to set wages and conditions free from outside interference. The Wage Board reported in 1928:

In many industries employers, in their desire to escape from the operation of the Act, have urged their employees to form trade unions for the purpose of their joining and setting up industrial councils. Some employers have gone so far as to pay the salary and expenses of persons to undertake the organization into trade unions of employees in the industry...<sup>6</sup>

Such was the enthusiasm amongst the new manufacturers' associations and union officials that 'agreements' were negotiated before the name of the union had been decided upon.

The galvanic effect of the Wage Act on both employer and union organization is seldom recognised in recent literature on the results of the 1920's labour legislation. In the Cape clothing industry the Wage Act was the crucial element in this organization and in the formation of industrial councils in 1927 and 1936. As the Wage Board commented in a review of its first three years of operation:

At the time when the Wage Board was set up very little use had been made of the Industrial Conciliation Act, except in the printing and building industries. By the passing of the Wage Act a tremendous fillip was given to the formation of industrial councils.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Wage Board Report February 1928 op.cit., paragraph 48.

7. Ibid. See also Lucas (1933) p.56.

The vitality conferred upon worker and employer organization by these two Acts was deceptive. It was not the result of worker victories in the struggle against the bosses. It was not the result of a need on the part of employers to protect themselves against mounting worker demands. The spur to organize had its origins purely in the legislation. Employers organized to protect themselves against the uncertainties of state intervention in their industries. In Cape Town, with its tradition of weak and limited worker organization, many new unions were created at the behest of the employers simply as a necessary step in the formation of an industrial council. These unions were created by the CFLU officials with very little participation by the workers they were supposed to represent. They had no reason for existence beyond their membership of the industrial council.

The panic of the clothing manufacturers in the face of the Wage Act is an index of their extreme vulnerability. But if the threat of a Wage Board determination made the manufacturers panic, when faced by a determination in reality, the members of the CWCMA showed themselves resourceful in adapting to it and devious in adapting it to their needs. They came, very soon, to like the wage determinations and rejected numerous appeals from the still-born Garment Workers' Union for the formation of an industrial council.

In the ten years that wage determinations governed the Cape clothing industry (1926 to 1936), the Department of Labour was never in a position to enforce them properly. Several determinations were declared invalid or delayed by court rulings. Manufacturers evaded determinations 'legally' by being granted exemptions from paying the set wages. Their illegal ploys included bribing labour inspectors; forcing workers immediately to repay a portion of their wage; keeping two wage registers - one for inspection and one reflecting the wages actually paid; or simply ignoring the determination and counting on not being inspected. There were far too few inspectors to enforce the determinations systematically and in any event the fines imposed were very small. (Laite, 1947, pp.181, 232)

It is the argument of Rob Davies (1979, p.213) that the Wage Board set minimum wages which were based on those already paid

by larger, more mechanised capitals which employed relatively more white workers. This gave such firms a competitive advantage over small, less mechanised capitals, for it obliged the latter also to pay higher wages. Such firms had to mechanise, merge or go under. The Wage Board thus promoted the trend towards mechanisation in South African industry while also promoting the employment of whites. This argument can only be sustained if the wage determinations were enforced against small manufacturers. They were not so enforced in the clothing industry and there are strong indications that the same is true of other industries until at least the mid 1930's. This chapter shows that while the Wage Board was not irrelevant to the mechanisation of industry, the improvement of working conditions and the increased employment of whites, its role and that of the Wage Act, in these processes, was more complex and more interesting than is suggested by Davies.

This chapter examines the growth of the clothing industry and the development of worker and employer organization in the ten years before the formation of an industrial council. This period is marked first by intense opposition to the Wage Board by the manufacturers and then by their acceptance of the Wage Board system and willing adaptation to it. The origins of the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula and worker responses to the Wage Board's activities in the first phase are dealt with here but the full description of garment worker organization after 1929 is reserved for the following chapters. The motivating power behind this organization was not the industrial legislation but the desire of the Transvaal garment workers' union to extend its influence to the Cape. The present chapter is intended as a case study of the early practices of the Wage Board as well as an account of the effects wage determinations had on the clothing industry.

## 1 Home Rule Denied

The agitation by Cape clothing manufacturers against the Wage Board was spearheaded by the CWCMA. Although the registered employers' organization, it was not properly representative of all the clothing manufacturers until 1935. Few small factories were represented and several of the large factories were not members

either. All Cut, Make and Trim factories and those producing at "the lower end of the trade" were excluded.<sup>8</sup> Such concerns existed because of the low barriers to entry into the clothing industry. They operated with the minimum of fixed capital and had to rely mainly on low labour costs to be competitive. Members of the CWCMA were the more 'responsible' employers who saw the value of an industry-wide minimum wage in ending the cut-throat competition from sweaters and rat-shops.

Seven firms constituted the core of the CWCMA. A. Fraser & Co. and The African Clothing Factory were the largest and longest established factories, each employing over 200 workers and dating from before the First World War. They were represented by W.M. Middlemass, the doyen of Cape clothing manufacturers who served as chairman until 1937, and by Toby Roytowski. M. Bertish & Co., Hogsett, Stephens & Bishop and Ackermans Ltd. were also founder members of the Association. Monat & Co., a high quality shirt factory was established after tariff protection was granted and, with its founder, Edgar Jacobs, became one of the pillars of the organization. The last of the core members was Jaques Hau et Cie which joined in 1928. By 1928, the ten members of the CWCMA probably employed just over half of the factory workers.<sup>9</sup> W.J. Laite, the secretary until 1938, was the capable advisor, prodder and factotum of the CWCMA. His close knowledge of developments in other industries, his contacts in the trade union movement and the government, allowed him to set out clearly alternative courses of action for the manufacturers to choose between.

The first battlement the CWCMA tried to erect against the Wage Act in 1925 was an industrial council "to settle the question of working conditions as between employer and employee".<sup>10</sup> Consequently,

...it would be essential...to ask the Federation of Trades to arrange for the organization of the employees in the clothing trade.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence 1935, pp.3202, 3502.

9. Report from the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town to the Secretary for Labour c.19 July 1928 S.A.B. ARB1069/22; CWCMA Minutes 1928 - M2/1.

10. Clothing Section Minutes: 24 August 1925 - M1/1.

11. Ibid.

To assist in this Laite "persuaded the clothing manufacturers to allow Stuart or his representatives to enter the factories".<sup>12</sup> But even so, the formation of an union of clothing workers was no simple matter. The Federation was busy with the rejuvenation of their existing unions and the creation of new unions with better prospects than one for clothing workers. The failure of past efforts in this industry showed that organization was not easily sustained. After three months the CWCMA was still "waiting on the organization of labour".<sup>13</sup> And no progress had been made by March 1926 when the Wage Board was directed by the Minister of Labour to investigate the clothing industry.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless the CWCMA sent a deputation to the Minister asking that he condone the formation of an industrial council,

...and if labour was not properly organized, to ask the Minister to appoint representative employees in the clothing industry to serve on such Industrial Council.<sup>15</sup>

The Minister stated in a letter that he understood,

...that the employees in the clothing industry in the Cape are exceedingly difficult to organize and in the past have even feared to belong to any trade union.<sup>16</sup>

He encouraged the CWCMA to continue with the efforts to form a council which, he suggested, could take over the administration of the first wage determination.

Stuart began to create his Bespoke Tailors' Union shortly afterwards but he apparently made no headway with the union for ready-make workers.<sup>17</sup> Not even the semblance of a union existed when the Wage Board burst upon the scene with its recommendations.<sup>18</sup>

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12. Report by Mr. Freestone (Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town) c.March 1926 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

13. CWCMA Minutes: 28 October 1925 - M2/1.

14. CWCMA Minutes: 12 March 1926 - M2/1; Government Gazette 5 March 1926.

15. CWCMA Minutes: 12 March 1926 - M2/1.

16. Reply to Laite's letter of 8 March 1926 (see footnote 2 above) 12 March 1926 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

17. Report by Mr. Freestone c.March 1926; letter from Freestone to the Secretary for Labour, 11 September 1926 S.A.B ARB1058/27.

18. Social and Industrial Review Special Edition 30 September 1926.

The manufacturers reeled in shock and horror. The CWCMA called a Special Emergency Meeting to which all clothing factory owners were invited.

The Board's determination (sic) was so extraordinary and the rates of pay so totally impossible, that some line of action should be decided upon to combat it.<sup>19</sup>

J.W. Mushet said the proposals of the Board were,

...so revolutionary that it would be absolutely impossible to carry on any industry in the Cape area.<sup>20</sup>

Middlemass admitted that the Board was correct in some of its criticisms, particularly with regard to the training of labour,

...However, the drastic changes proposed so suddenly, if adopted would spell immediate ruin.<sup>21</sup>

On the face of it, the manufacturers were not over-reacting. In evidence to the Wage Board the CWCMA proposed a wage scale for female juvenile beginners in the industry. This scale, which they said was an improvement on existing conditions, compared with the Wage Board proposals as follows:<sup>22</sup>

		CWCMA Proposals	Wage Board Recommendation
First year	first 3 months	10/- per week	20/- per week
	second 3 months	10/-	25/-
	third 3 months	10/-	30/-
	fourth 3 months	10/-	32/6
Second year	first 3 months	12/6	35/-
	second 3 months	12/6	37/-
	second 6 months	12/6	40/-
Third year		15/-	(qualified)
Fourth year		17/6	
Qualified Wage		25/-	40/-

19. CWCMA Minutes: 7 October 1926 - M2/1.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Wage Board Report: Work of the Board for three years ended February 1928, op.cit., paragraph 308.

The CWCMA wanted a four year learning period; the Wage Board wanted the qualified wage to be paid after 18 months. In terms of the Wage Board recommendation, all employees would be entitled to 11 paid public holidays, one week paid annual leave, and one week of paid sick leave per year. Under existing conditions workers were paid only for time worked. The Board wanted a 15 minute rest period for workers in the morning. Mushet pointed out that this amounted to a loss of three working days per year. He said that,

...when all these additional charges were made, manufacturers would find their net profits considerably reduced. It was ridiculous to expect manufacturers to continue business when the return for their invested capital was so small. The position was that unless the award was altered manufacturers would be forced to close their factories.<sup>23</sup>

Laite suggested that the manufacturers together submit a memorandum of objection to the Wage Board recommendation. They should put forward alternative wage scales which, he stressed, "should be on the most liberal scale possible".<sup>24</sup> Middlemass said that once they had agreed on the memorandum, each firm should secure the approval of its work force. He did not anticipate any difficulty here:

...the coloured employees of today were seriously scared, and were feeling that the Wage Board award was an attempt to finally exclude coloured labour in various industries.<sup>25</sup>

The memorandum was finalised at another joint meeting of members of the CWCMA and other factory owners. A special fund was established to pay the expenses of a deputation which would present the memorandum to the Wage Board in Pretoria.<sup>26</sup>

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23. CWCMA Minutes: 7 October 1926 - M2/1.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. CWCMA Minutes: 19 October 1926 - M2/1.



The deputation begged the Wage Board to postpone making a final recommendation. They wanted an opportunity to form an industrial council for the Cape clothing industry. They promised that,

...not only would no obstacles be placed in the way of the organization of the employees into a trade union, but that the formation of such an organization would be actively encouraged.<sup>27</sup>

Laite stated that the firms were willing to issue notices,

...that no individual need fear any reprisals by associating himself with an organization of this character, and that the employers wish them to be associated with their particular unions.<sup>28</sup>

The Board wanted to encourage the formation of industrial councils and agreed to the request of the CWCMA for a postponement of the final recommendation. But the Wage Board set a condition. The draft industrial council agreement had to be sent to it for approval within four months. If the agreement was not "reasonable" a final recommendation would then be made by the Board and the agreement would not be gazetted. In the interview, the Board recommended that the Minister gazette as a determination the wages put forward by the CWCMA in their memorandum of objections. It did not regard these wages as adequate, but, it said,

They are put forward at this stage as representing some improvement on existing wage rates and as a scale of wages which the manufacturers themselves proposed.<sup>29</sup>

Wage Determination No.2 became effective in December 1926.<sup>30</sup>

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27. Wage Board Report: Interim Report on the Clothing Industry, 20 November 1926 Annexure 58-1927.

28. Wage Board Report: Clothing Manufacturing Industry, 25 September 1927, paragraph 6 Annexure 134-1927-8.

29. Wage Board Report: Interim Report, 20 November 1926 op.cit. Although the CWCMA (through Laite) agreed to this "interim recommendation" the resultant determination was held to be invalid after *Barone v. Rex* (1927, TPD) as it had not been published for objections.

30. Government Gazette: 3 December 1926; fold out table 4.2 on p.222, column 3.

Although the determination had been drawn up by the Cape manufacturers themselves, some were dissatisfied with the scale for male employees. Roytowski stated that "his firm could not pay the higher wages"<sup>31</sup> and he thought it unwise to begin paying now wages which could not be continued in future. Laite,

...strongly advised manufacturers to pay the wages laid down...He considered it would be a tactical blunder if manufacturers sacked their employees wholesale, as it would...make the formation of an Industrial Council for the industry more difficult and retard the bringing about of an agreement. Manufacturers had promised the Wage Board that they would do what they could to assist in organizing labour and had asked for the suspension of the initial award that they might form an Industrial Council for the industry. That undertaking should now be carried into effect.<sup>32</sup>

Middlemass supported Laite. He said there should be no sudden dismissal of workers. If dismissals were necessary they should be made gradually. The manufacturers should be willing to bear a small loss "in order to ensure the future administration of their industry".<sup>33</sup> It was agreed that the determination should be implemented "in the most sympathetic manner possible" as the manufacturers tried to beguile their workers first into a union and then into an industrial council.

It was not the best moment to press the Cape Federation to form the union. Relations with Stuart were at a low ebb. Stuart had become obsessed with having wholesale bespoke factory workers paid at the same rate as the retail bespoke tailoring workers. He conducted a relentless campaign against the wholesale bespoke employers at joint meetings with the MTA.<sup>34</sup> Laite thought that Stuart's hostility to the wholesale bespoke manufacturers might make difficult the organization of factory workers through the

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31. CWCMA Minutes: 8 December 1926 - M2/1.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. See MTA Minutes: 29 November 1926; 6 December 1926 - M3/2.

CFLU. The CWCMA decided to go it alone and organize the union for their workers themselves:

...each firm would ask its employees to elect representatives, and...these would meet to decide on the organization, and in consultation with the Chief Labour Inspector, prepare a constitution.<sup>35</sup>

The name of the new body was to be "The Cape Wholesale Shirt and Clothing Factory Employees Union" and the manufacturers would ask their employees to join it.

This union made no progress at all. Within a month the disagreement with Stuart had been patched up and he was again engaged as union creator. But once again CWCMA meetings were punctuated by complaints from members that "nothing had been done to organize the employees".<sup>36</sup> Whatever problems surrounded the formation of a union, the formation of the industrial council went on apace. The CWCMA approved its draft constitution, agreed on acceptable wage scales and asked Stuart to send in the names of the employee representatives.<sup>37</sup> If the clothing industry were to be granted 'home rule' under the Industrial Conciliation Act, the manufacturers would clearly be dominant.

The precise nature of Stuart's problems in organizing the first of the two separate unions ordered by the CWCMA and the MTA is not clear. He had made progress with the organization of the tailoring workers and was including wholesale bespoke factory workers in the union.<sup>38</sup> This move had the early support of the wholesale bespoke factory owners who offered to distribute handbills to their employees to encourage them to attend a recruitment meeting.<sup>39</sup> At every opportunity Laite urged all the clothing manufacturers "to do everything possible in their power

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35. CWCMA Minutes: 29 November 1926 - M2/1.

36. CWCMA Minutes: 24 January 1927 - M2/1.

37. Ibid. The wage scale was the same as in Wage Determination No.2 except for the grading of qualified male employees.

38. The Wage Board was investigating wholesale bespoke tailoring with retail bespoke tailoring rather than with the other clothing factories. The wholesale bespoke factory owners always belonged to the CWCMA.

39. MTA Minutes: 6 December 1926 - M3/2.

to assist the union to organize".<sup>40</sup> Hindrances to organization did not come from the employers. In January 1927 Stuart approached Laite and said that his lack of success in organizing the factory workers was

...owing to the fact that the employees in the various branches of the clothing industry were at variance regarding the operations of workers in the different sections.<sup>41</sup>

He said that unless he could organize workers into one union for all the branches of the clothing industry "it would be impossible to organize them at all".<sup>42</sup> Stuart therefore asked the manufacturers to approve the formation of a single union which would then be a party to a joint industrial council for the tailoring and clothing industries.

Laite persuaded the employers that such an industrial council would have independent sections and pointed to the success of the national industrial council for the leather industry which had such a structure. He added that the union had agreed to admit the journeymen tailors as members and,

This would be a great advantage in the formation of an Industrial Council as a better type of representative for the employees would be provided from the ranks of the journeymen tailors.<sup>43</sup>

Roytowski sounded a note of caution. He said that by forming one industrial council

...manufacturers were putting a power in the hands of labour who would then be able in the event of a strike to call out the employees in all sections.<sup>44</sup>

Middlemass said that strikes would be illegal and punishable by imprisonment. In any event, all factory owners and tailors pre-

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40. MTA Minutes: 6 December 1926 - M3/2.

41. MTA Minutes: 2 February 1927, joint meeting with CWCMA - M3/1.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

ferred the risks of a joint industrial council to the certainty of a hostile dictatorship under the Wage Board. The establishment of the "Industrial Council for the Garment Manufacturing Industries" took place even before the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula had been constituted.<sup>45</sup>

Although itself unregistered and including a union that had not even applied for registration, the 'industrial council' sent off an agreement to the Wage Board for its approval in April.<sup>46</sup> The agreement was rejected as unacceptable and the Wage Board set about framing a final recommendation. The Board in fact reopened its investigation of the clothing industry and held long informal discussions with the 'industrial council'.<sup>47</sup> In August, just as the Garment Workers' Union was finally registered, the CWCMA decided to stop pressing for registration of the industrial council until the Wage Board had made its recommendation.<sup>48</sup> The bosses wanted to be sure of where they stood before committing themselves to participation in an industrial council.

Ivan Walker, the Chief Inspector of Labour, commented that he thought the delay advantageous:

I am not satisfied that the employees are organized to an extent justifying the early negotiation of a wage agreement.<sup>49</sup>

The GWU-CP then claimed a membership of between five and six hundred<sup>50</sup> - less than half the total number of workers in the industry - and the chairman, secretary and treasurer of the Union were none of them garment workers.

The new Wage Board draft recommendation, while not as drastic as the first, proposed considerably higher wages than Determination

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45. The Union's constitution was submitted to the Registrar of Trade Unions in April 1927. Letter from Stuart to the Registrar, 28 April 1927 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

46. 'Industrial Council for the Garment Manufacturing Industries' Minutes: 5 April 1927 - M4/1; see Table 4.2 column 5, p.222, below.

47. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927, op.cit.

48. Letter from Laite to the Secretary for Labour, 27 August 1927 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

49. Note from Walker to the Secretary for Labour, 2 September 1927 S.A.B. ARB 1058/27.

50. Letter from Stuart to W. Freestone, 9 August 1927 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

No.2.<sup>51</sup> The CWCMA then asked the Minister to register the Industrial Council and gazette the agreement. But the GWU-CP had also seen the draft recommendation and temporarily withdrew its membership of the Industrial Council as it thought it would get better terms from the Wage Board.<sup>52</sup>

It again joined the council when it became clear that the new wage determination would still be delayed several months. Conditions in the industry were deteriorating as certain "unscrupulous" employers, anticipating the final publication of a Wage determination, "were working at top speeds to produce stocks whilst paying low wages".<sup>53</sup> Wage Determination No.2 had been declared invalid in a court case<sup>54</sup> so employers could pay as little as they wished. Stuart was under pressure from garment workers. The Wage Board could provide no statutory wage standard for at least several months - the recommendation had not been gazetted for objection yet - so Stuart called a mass meeting of garment workers which passed a resolution demanding that,

...the Industrial Council agreement be published immediately...(I)f there is any further delay in the publication the Department of Labour will be responsible for any action that may be taken by the employees within a reasonable period.<sup>55</sup>

Stuart explained to the Minister that the workers were extremely dissatisfied and had taken him (Stuart) to task for accepting all the delays. He had indeed "not done what was expected" of him and he admitted the criticism to be "in a measure justifiable". But, he wrote, this was because he "realised the difficulties of the Department",

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51. See Table 4.2 column 4. The recommendation was circulated in a draft form in September 1927, see CWCMA Minutes: 2 September 1927 - M2/1. The recommendation was gazetted on 30 December 1927.

52. The date of this incident is not clear. It is reported in a letter from the Labour Inspector, Cape Town to the Secretary for Labour dated 12 October 1929 (ARB1058/27) as having occurred sometime after the Wage Board had rejected the agreement.

53. CWCMA Minutes: 10 November 1927 - M2/1.

54. Barone v. Rex (1927 TPD). Text of judgement in Social and Industrial Review 3 (18) June 1927, pp.607-612.

55. Letter from Stuart to the Minister of Labour, 11 October 1927 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

I kept on telling the Union from time to time that the agreement would in due course be published. The organization has now got tired of the promises I have made and have stated that they want the immediate publication of their agreement, the employers, they claim, are taking as much advantage of the position as they possibly can...<sup>56</sup>

Stuart hoped the resolution would be respected by the Department as,

...I am afraid I shall not be able to satisfy them much longer.<sup>57</sup>

Matters came to a head in November. Speeding up and overtime in the factories continued and Stuart was under ever-increasing pressure. He appealed to the Minister:

...I am being continually questioned as to the reason why the agreement has not become operative which I am unable to give and you will easily understand the difficult position I am in, and I shall be glad if you will be good enough to make the necessary inquiries as soon as possible as I am afraid that I cannot hold up the position any longer.<sup>58</sup>

Then, at a "somewhat stormy" meeting in the Trades Hall<sup>59</sup> the committee of the Garment Workers' Union, which was composed of workers and not just Federation officials,

...decided in their own minds that the agreement arranged by the National (sic) Council was not what they desired and preferred that the working conditions be laid down by the Wage Board.<sup>60</sup>

In spite of this decision, Stuart told Laite the very next day that,

he thought the employees would be willing to come under the Agreement as set out by the Garment Industrial Coun-

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56. Letter from Stuart to the Minister of Labour, 11 October 1927 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

57. Ibid.

58. Letter from Stuart to the Minister of Labour, 3 November 1927 S.A.B. ARB1058/27.

59. CWCMA Minutes; 10 November 1927 - M2/1.

60. CFLU Minutes: 1 November 1927 (TUCSA Archives). Rose Crawford, later an official of the GWU-CP, recalled later that "the workers turned down the industrial council" (GWU Commission of Inquiry, Minutes of Evidence, Cape Town 1949, p.121).

cil...it would not be a difficult matter to get the employees to agree to the registration of an Industrial Council and to get the Minister to withdraw the terms of reference from the Wage Board.<sup>61</sup>

Stuart had no right to speak with such confidence. The Minister of Labour had never been pliable to Stuart's wishes - or to those of the CWCMA, and the workers on the GWU-CP committee were showing a wholly new and unexpected independence of mind.

The Federation Executive strongly advised the GWU-CP against withdrawing from the industrial council:

(It) pointed out to the Garment Workers that it would be in their best interest to accept the terms laid down in the agreement, they may not be all that was desired but they were certainly an improvement on their present conditions...<sup>62</sup>

The GWU-CP committee asked the Federation to call a general meeting of garment workers "so that the rank and file could have the true position placed before them".<sup>63</sup> The workers obviously preferred the higher rates of the draft Wage Board recommendation to those of the 'industrial council' agreement.<sup>64</sup> The meeting condemned Stuart's promotion of his agreement with the employers in the face of a more favourable Wage Board recommendation and repudiated the agreement. Stuart resigned as secretary of the Union.

Twenty years later, Stuart recollected the meeting in his memoirs:

A General Meeting of the Union was convened at which the proposed terms of settlement were submitted, and discussed, in great detail, together with the projected establishment of an Industrial Council for the entire industry, including bespoke tailoring...The meeting,

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61. CWCMA Minutes: 10 November 1927 - M2/1.

62. CFLU Minutes: 11 November 1927.

63. Ibid.

64. CFLU Minutes: 17 November 1927 (TUCSA Archives).



however, rejected the settlement which had been negotiated, as also the proposal to establish an Industrial Council. The members present clamoured for a Wage Board investigation, and determination, which, they claimed, would accord them higher rates of wages, and better working conditions, than they could hope to secure from any agreement negotiated by an Industrial Council. My colleagues and I, who had conducted the negotiations on behalf of the Union, stressed that the terms of settlement represented the maximum which we had been able to secure, and that we had agreed to the terms of the settlement, as submitted to the meeting. We outlined the full history of the negotiations and of the struggle which had been necessary to obtain these terms of settlement. All this, however, proved of no avail, and it became abundantly evident that the general feeling was that I had negotiated an unacceptable agreement. In view of this, I informed the Meeting that I was, on no account, prepared to continue in office as Secretary and that I would never again be persuaded to conduct any negotiations on behalf of the Union. I accordingly again relinquished office,<sup>65</sup> as Secretary, and my withdrawal from this position was followed by a prolonged period of inactivity during the course of which the Union virtually ceased to function. (Stuart, 1950i)

The Cape clothing manufacturers and the Cape Federation tried over a two year period to circumvent a Wage Board determination for the clothing industry by resorting to the formation of an industrial council. Each had different reasons for following this strategy. The manufacturers wanted to avoid uneconomic minimum wages and the interference of a "third party" in their industry.

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65. Stuart had been asked to resign as secretary of the Tailors and Tailoresses Union in 1917 after negotiating an unpopular agreement with the employers (Stuart 1950i). Although Stuart is correct in pointing to the subsequent inactivity of the GWU-CP he retained a close interest in the Union and negotiated often in its name. Until 1932 he remained the registered secretary of the GWU-CP.

Although an industrial council would involve the manufacturers in contributing to the costs of administering the agreement, the fact that the minimum wages payable under the agreement were lower than under the proposed wage determination would more than compensate for contributions to the industrial council's running costs. Laite told the manufacturers that,

...it had been the experience in other Industries, where Industrial Councils operated, that employees were usually reasonable. The success of the deliberations of the Council very largely depended upon careful administration. On the whole, the position was a very satisfactory one.<sup>66</sup>

The Cape Federation was attracted to the industrial council system because its stop orders and officially recognised unions allowed a rapid and easy growth of the 'labour movement'. The failure of the, apparently irresistible, combined determination of the organization-brokers, Stuart and Laite, to get their industrial council in the clothing industry is immediately ascribable to two factors: the opposition of the garment workers and the attitude of the Department of Labour and the Wage Board.

The garment workers were often described by Stuart as apathetic.<sup>67</sup> Even when employers ceased to victimize union members after 1925 and assisted efforts to unionize all their workers, the response to the clarion call of the Federation was tardy and unenthusiastic. The great difficulty in organizing the garment workers delayed the formation of an industrial council for over a year. Once a union had been imposed on the workers, they demanded improved conditions and resisted being manipulated into an industrial council subject to an agreement they had no part in negotiating and which set lower wages than recommended by the Wage Board.<sup>68</sup> In 1935, when the CWCMA again began negotiations

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66. CWCMA Minutes: 10 November 1927 - M2/1.

67. Stuart 1950i; CFLU Annual Reports: 1931, p.12; 1932, p.5.

68. There is no evidence of malice in Stuart's conduct. He always believed he acted in the best interests of the workers, even when working as the tool of the bosses, and was always surprised when workers showed themselves ungrateful for his efforts. Stuart was never a meek servant of the employers he worked with; he often bargained hard and could be unpredictable if he did not get his way. But his unionism was that of the friendly society suited to advancing slowly the interests

for an industrial council, Roytowski reminded the employers that in 1927 they,

...in co-operation with the employees, had formulated an agreement which the Minister had refused to gazette, simply on account of the dispute which had subsequently arisen among the members of the Union itself.<sup>69</sup>

Roytowski's memory was too generous to the power of the workers. Other considerations also weighed with the Minister's decision. By late 1927 the Department of Labour had begun to resolve the practical difficulties which confronted it over the relationship between the Wage Board and industrial councils. Boydell, the Minister of Labour, had approved the policy that if an industrial council was set up in an industry after the Wage Board had begun an investigation, no agreement would be gazetted until after the Board had reported.<sup>70</sup> In the case of the clothing industry, Ivan Walker, the Chief Inspector of Labour, urged that an industrial council agreement for Cape Town should not be gazetted unless the final Wage Board recommendation was accepted as its basis. He set out two reasons for this. Firstly, he still doubted that the workers were sufficiently in control of the Union as all the executive positions were held by non-garment workers. Secondly, he took account of the very keen competition between the coastal and Transvaal clothing manufacturers. If the Minister were to legalize the payment of wages lower than those recommended by the Wage Board this would maintain rather than reduce the threat to the higher standards of Transvaal clothing workers.

Together, the Wage Board, the Department of Labour and the garment workers decided that the Wage Board and not a boss-dominated industrial council would set minimum wages in the Cape clothing industry.

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of skilled artisans. There was no need to organize strongly when the scarcity and skill of workers was their strength. Most disputes could be settled by negotiation, most advances won through negotiation. The idea that a union of unskilled workers could only rely on their collective strength and willingness to strike was totally foreign to him.

69. CWCMA Minutes: 5 March 1935 - M2/1.

70. Letter from H.F. Cuff, "C" Division, Department of Labour to the Secretary for Labour, 6 December 1927 S.A.B ARB1058/27.

## 2 A Benevolent Despotism

...the Board's aim is to create a system of justice under which industry will be stimulated and its products justly distributed.

- Chairman of the Wage Board, 1926<sup>71</sup>

The promulgation of the Wage Act (No.27 of 1925) was delayed until February 1926, after the Economic and Wage Commission had presented its reports.<sup>72</sup> The Commission had made recommendations on how the Wage Board ought to function and had pointed to the industries which most needed wage regulation. One of the members of the Commission, F.A.W. Lucas, K.C., was appointed the first chairman of the Board.<sup>73</sup>

The political significance of the Pact government's "civilized labour policy", of which the Wage Act was but a part, has been well interpreted by Davies (1979, p.199 et seq.) and Kaplan (1977, pp.92-105). In the aftermath of the 1922 strike, there was a need to restore the confidence of white wage earners in the state as looking after their interests and there was a need to provide new structures to contain white wage earners' economic struggles. Poor whiteness represented a threat to the state's attempt to draw all whites into a common position of support for the form of state and so to preserve its racially exclusive character. The aim of the civilized labour policy was to provide employment for whites at civilized wages and to prevent them from having cause to contemplate any sort of political alliance with poor blacks. The new forms of state intervention by which the civilized labour policy was advanced were made possible by the new era of capitalist development promoted by the Pact government. This new era was hallmarked by the growth of manufacturing industries behind a protective customs tariff.

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71. 'Inaugural Meeting of the Wage Board' Social and Industrial Review April 1926, p.241.

72. 'The Wage Act Explained' Social and Industrial Review March 1926, p.147.

73. The other two members of the Board were magistrates, one of whom was replaced by W. Freestone, the Divisional Inspector of Labour in Cape Town in 1928. Lucas was intensely interested in social legislation and was a champion of the weak working class. He put a progressive stamp on the activities of the Wage Board in his ten years as its chairman.

The Wage Act had two aims within this context. The first was "to safeguard civilized standards of living for workers" and the second "to avoid holding back the productive energy of the country".<sup>74</sup> The Board was very conscious of the special difficulties of applying wage regulation in South Africa where the gap between skilled and unskilled wage levels was so great. This gap represented a serious threat to the attainment of "civilized standards". To prevent "the undercutting of civilized standards by the competition of low-paid, low-standard uncivilized labour"<sup>75</sup> the Act had no 'colour bar' - the wage determination applied to all workers. Ultimately, said Lucas,

...there should be no-one in the community who will not receive from day to day sufficient of the necessities of life to maintain a civilized existence.<sup>76</sup>

The task of setting 'civilized standards' while at the same time not hampering the growth of industry was self-limiting. When confronted by the realities of industrial economics in South Africa, the Board often did not raise wages immediately to a 'civilized' level. All the wage determinations in the clothing industry included wages which did not allow a 'civilized' standard of living. Also, the Board did not set up some ideal scale of civilized wages and propel its industries in that direction. As Lucas said,

The evidence given before the Economic Commission... showed that even in the worst sweated industries there is a proportion of employers who are paying fair wages and giving good conditions to their workers. It seems to us that where one employer can pay good wages and give good conditions there is no reason why those who are paying sweated wages should not be compelled eventually to rise to the same standard as the good employer.<sup>77</sup>

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74. Lucas, 'Inaugural Meeting...' op.cit., p.239.

75. 'The Wage Act Explained' op.cit., p.138.

76. Lucas, 'Inaugural Meeting...' op.cit., pp.239-240.

77. Ibid.

The Wage Board came to see industries in terms of good and bad employers. In practical terms the object of the Wage Board was to move all wages up towards those currently paid by the good employers. No fall in output should follow as the good employer would have "no additional burden placed on him that he does not carry today"<sup>78</sup> and the employer of sweated labour, after changes in "management", would compete on equal terms. As the Board said:

...sweated wages mean inefficiency, ill-nourishment, discontent, anxiety and consequently low output.<sup>79</sup>

Better conditions would encourage workers to increase their efficiency and output.

The Board did not, as its early detractors feared, dictate 'scientifically' sanctioned 'civilized' wages. Rather, after much consultation with employers and workers, it set minimum wages approaching those paid by "employers of good repute".<sup>80</sup>

This statement might appear to contradict what we have seen in the Cape clothing industry, where recommended wages were far above those paid by the most enlightened employer and where the loudest opposition came from precisely this quarter. The problem was that in the clothing industry, the Wage Board found good employers only on the Witwatersrand and only bad employers in the coastal areas, of which Cape Town was the most important. So in attempting to bring more civilized standards to the clothing industry, the Wage Board had to tackle the question of the wage disparity between the Witwatersrand and the Cape.

This wage differential was the underlying cause of virtually all 'labour unrest' in the Cape clothing industry between 1930 and 1957 when Transvaal wages finally fell to coastal levels. It was also a major reason behind the Wage Board investigations of the clothing industry. The low wages in Cape Town threatened the standards of clothing workers on the Witwatersrand, 95 per cent of whom were whites and consequently specially deserving of civilized wages. It can be said that without the wage disparity

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78. Lucas, 'Inaugural Meeting...' op.cit., pp.239-240.

79. Ibid.

80. 'The Wage Act Explained' op.cit., p.148.

the Cape clothing industry would have a very different history.

Many different arguments were put forward to explain the wage disparity. Transvaal clothing manufacturers and the Transvaal garment workers' union said that Cape manufacturers paid starvation wages to a more exploitable work force. Cape manufacturers disputed that the high wages of the Transvaal agreement were enforced. The Cape union argued that the Transvaal union and manufacturers only wanted Cape wages to rise so as to take all the business to Johannesburg. In many industries lower wages were paid at the Cape than in the Transvaal. It was commonly held that this was the penalty Cape workers paid to work at all in industry.<sup>81</sup>

At the time of the first Wage Board investigation into the clothing industry the wage differential was enormous. In 1925 the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association and the Witwatersrand Tailors' Association had formed an industrial council which covered factory workers. The first agreement set wages more than double those paid in Cape Town.<sup>82</sup> The Wage Board wanted to establish a single minimum wage for the whole country to prevent unfair competition between the regions. It stressed that,

...in any scale of wages...there has to be such a relationship between the rates in one section of the country and the rates in another section that will not allow one section to exploit cheap labour and reduce the standard of living in another part.<sup>83</sup>

But the wages on the Witwatersrand were so much higher than at the coast that,

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81. Appendix A, below, discusses the extent, effects and causes of the wage disparity in the clothing industry between inland and coastal factories.

82 See Table 4.2 column 11.

This was the first agreement to be gazetted under the Industrial Conciliation Act (Government Gazette 4 September 1925). It ran until March 1927 when the TCMA refused to extend or renegotiate the agreement until the Wage Board had made a final recommendation for the coastal areas. As this agreement existed at the time the Wage Board investigation began, Transvaal workers covered by the agreement were excluded from its terms of reference.

83. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927 op.cit., paragraph 36.

...the enforcement of them there would seriously dis-  
locate the industry and probably cause considerable  
hardship.<sup>84</sup>

The Wage Board consequently planned to superintend a slow process of adjustment by which coastal wages would be brought up to the Transvaal level in stages. This intention is clearly expressed in the Wage Board reports surrounding its investigations in 1926/8, 1931/2, and 1934/6.

The core of a wage determination was, of course, the wage scale. But also important were the holiday, leave and sick pay provisions, the limits on the hours of work, the tea-breaks or rest periods specified and the payment for overtime. Manufacturers argued with the Board on each of these points. Their concern was not only with the absolute level of the wages but also with the structure of the wage scales. The salient features of this were the length of the period for which new workers were classified as 'learners' on lower wages; the ratio between learners and qualified workers in a factory and the number of different wage categories allowed for qualified workers.

There was no system of apprenticeship or formal training for machinists in the clothing industry. Workers were trained on the job. The Wage Board proposed wages for learners which rose by small amounts periodically until they reached the qualified wage. The manufacturers were concerned that the increments should be as infrequent as possible, that the period of learnership should be as long as possible and that the wages, specially the starting minimum should be as low as possible. If the learnership period was, say, three years, but most learners were in fact 'efficient' workers after 18 months, the manufacturers would have another 18 months of output from workers paid artificially low wages. Manufacturers first wanted a four year learnership period but they later agreed that three years was acceptable. The Board indicated that it regarded 18 months as a more realistic period but it recommended three years as "the employees will accept it".<sup>85</sup>

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84. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927 op.cit., paragraph 12.

85. Ibid., paragraph 27.



This over-long learnership period obviously encouraged the manufacturers to employ relatively more learners and to dismiss employees as they became entitled to the qualified wage. To limit this practice - which was effectively an avoidance of paying higher wages - the Wage Board set a minimum ratio of qualified to unqualified workers. The ratio provision caused much conflict between the manufacturers and the Wage Board and was also a source of disagreement between members of the CWCMA.

The third characteristic of the wage determinations was their favouring of flat minima for large groups of qualified workers. The manufacturers preferred that a worker qualify for a specific job which had its individual wage rate. The more specific jobs in a factory and the more specific wages, the greater was the scope for marginal 'underpayment'. The Board was opposed to piecework and set only time wages. However factories could operate a modified piecework system with a guaranteed weekly minimum time wage.

The Wage Board was frequently ridiculed by both employers and workers, as a group of outsiders who had no knowledge of their industry and no competence to recommend working conditions. The Board may have been ignorant when it began an investigation, but it did not remain so. One is impressed by the comprehensiveness of Wage Board reports and the seriousness with which they dealt with objections to the recommendations. Before framing its recommendations in the case of the clothing industry, the Board visited factories all over South Africa, spent long hours in informal discussion with employer and worker representatives and studied the effects which wage regulation had had on the clothing industry in other countries, such as Britain, Australia and New Zealand. The Board was strongly influenced by the experience of Britain and, in particular, by R.H. Tawney's book on the establishment of minimum wages in the clothing industry under the 1909 Trades Boards Act (Tawney, 1915).

Tawney documents and analyses the application of wage regulation to an industry vastly larger and more complex than that in South Africa. The 'Tailoring Trades Board' differed in important respects from the South African Wage Board. It was made up of an equal number of appointed employer and worker 'representatives'

with a few more representatives of the public. Wage rates and certain other conditions were then fixed by a process of 'negotiation'. The Act did not exclude organized industries - although the clothing industry was little organized - nor did it require wages to conform to a 'civilized standard'. Yet Tawney's evaluation of the effects of imposing minimum wages on the clothing industry in Britain had obvious relevance for the Wage Board.

His study showed the minimum wages legislation to have had largely beneficial results. Some struggling businesses had closed down but Tawney argued that the future of the industry did not lie with them but with the "efficient factory occupiers" who were paying more than the rates fixed by the Board before these became law. The "less progressive factory occupiers" had held their position in the trade "mainly by employing the worst paid women workers to produce the cheapest goods" (p.104). They had to choose between bringing "their management into line with that of their more efficient competitors" or going under.

The enactment of minimum rates affected less than half of the 145 000 workers under the Tailoring Trades Board in 1914 (pp.65;71) and the wage rises were often very small, but evidence suggested that advances in wages stimulated improvements in both worker and factory efficiency. Tawney argued that under low rates of pay workers had no incentive to exert themselves to produce as the marginal return for the increased effort was so small. They were also less able to work at their best because of the "listlessness and despair" which accompanied low wages (p.133). Once higher rates were paid, workers worked more efficiently. This was stated by many employers (pp.121-135). The "economy of high wages" (p.135) was even more strikingly illustrated in improvements in factory management. Some employers did respond by increasing the intensity of labour ("slave driving") but apart from this,

...the evidence...suggests that almost the first effect of an advance in wages is to lead the employers most affected by it to search, and search successfully, for ways of producing cheaply to which they were indifferent before the increase (p.136).

The supervision of workers was tightened up. More foremen and forewomen were employed to decrease time wasted in late arrival

at work, rest intervals and talking. "Speeding up" was sometimes taken to extremes. Workers were pressured into working harder to earn the minimum time wages on very low piece rates. Abuses like this were difficult to check, but other improvements in factory management made them less necessary. Learners were now carefully trained; work processes were rationalized, better methods were found of sub-dividing the work; and finally more machinery was introduced. Sewing machines were power driven, buttonholing and buttonsewing machines became more widespread (pp.135-155). The effect of advances in wages was,

...to increase the efficiency of the worst paid workers and to level up the organization of the most backward to that of the most progressive firms (p.159).

Regional wage differences in Britain were even greater than in South Africa. The great divide was between the better paid workers in more mechanised factories in the north and the very badly paid London clothing workers.<sup>86</sup> Tawney held that low wages in the south were not due to any special characteristics of the clothing industry there, but rather to the fact that the labour market as a whole gave rise to a supply of artificially cheapened women's labour (p.115).<sup>87</sup> In such an area, if no minimum wage was in force, an employer could be as backward as he pleased and yet survive merely because labour was cheap (p.160). The imposition of a minimum wage by the Tailoring Trades Board (or by a trade union) was thus followed by "a general increase of efficiency both among workers and among manufacturers" as work was better organized and more mechanized (p.160).

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86. No such dramatic difference existed in levels of mechanization between the Cape and Transvaal clothing industries.

87. "(I)t is very largely from the wives and daughters of the worst paid and most irregularly paid male workers that the ranks of the home-workers in the tailoring trade are recruited ....wages are lower in certain districts than in others, not because the industry cannot afford to pay as much in the former as the latter, but because the conditions in other industries - in London, in particular, dock labour - are such that women are obliged to work on any terms that they can get..." (p.115). See also Stedman Jones (1971, Part 1) and Schmiechen (1975). Both deal with an earlier period than Tawney but discuss this issue.

The minimum wage set by the Trades Board was never a maximum wage. Many workers were already paid above the minimum and the Trades Board system encouraged the formation or revival of trade unions which negotiated higher wages (p.90). Tawney comments:

...(The workers) are more hopeful, more alert and more enterprising. The State has given them a little help. Therefore they are more prepared to fight their own battles and help themselves. Even from the purely economic point of view they are better workers, because they are less spiritless and more hopeful (pp.134-5).

Despite the fact that this report was fifteen years old and referred to the experience of a very different country, it was carefully read and cited by the Wage Board in its reports.<sup>88</sup> It must have been a solace to the Board in the face of the bitter criticism from the Cape manufacturers.

The CWCMA did not appreciate the research the Wage Board had done before framing its final recommendations. In their new memorandum of objections, the manufacturers asserted that the determination would mean immediate "ruination" to smaller, less organized firms and would be "a very serious menace" to the larger firms which would be forced out of business "by a gradual process of attrition".<sup>89</sup> The CWCMA held that the determination would nullify all the advantage they derived from the customs tariff on imported clothing. They drew up tables of comparisons between Wage Board rates and wages currently paid in Britain and other competitors from overseas. These purported to show that the recommended wages were far higher than those paid by overseas clothing factories.<sup>90</sup> The memorandum continued:

A careful perusal of this data will...convince the Minister how utterly impossible it is for the Clothing Industry to function successfully if a Determination

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88. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927 op.cit., paragraphs 17, 18, 35, 40.

89. CWCMA Memorandum of Objections to the Wage Board's Recommendations, January 1928 (CCI Archives).

90. In 1934 one Cape clothing manufacturer told the Customs Tariff Commission that "compared with South Africa, (England) is a low-wage country". (Minutes of Evidence, p.3497)

is made fixing the various rates of wages...which are desired by the Wage Board...(T)he only result which can accrue from the efforts of the Wage Board will be the placing on the streets of a large number of employees.<sup>91</sup>

The Board replied to the objections but rejected them.<sup>92</sup> They regarded the wages as a "reasonable compromise between the claims of employers and employees"<sup>93</sup> and urged the Minister to gazette them as a wage determination.

In March 1928 the Cape manufacturers began a public campaign against the recommendation. They agreed that "an organized fight would have to be launched in the interests of this industry".<sup>94</sup> The memorandum of objections was translated into Afrikaans and bilingual copies were distributed to Members of Parliament, Senators and the press. Much time was spent in lobbying Nationalist MP's. It was hoped that if enough pressure was brought to bear on the government by their own supporters, an interview with the prime minister could be arranged. The Wage Board later remarked that the press campaign against the recommendation "was conducted... with the utmost vigour, and a considerable disregard for the facts".<sup>95</sup> Despite the efforts "to prevent the ruination of the industry",<sup>96</sup> the recommendation became law in June 1928 as Wage Determination No.15.<sup>97</sup>

### 3 Above and Below Board 1928-1934

The fears of the manufacturers that the Wage Board would bring ruin in its wake proved to be groundless. Although the next six years were marked by extremes of economic fluctuation in addition to the rule of the Wage Board, the Cape clothing industry emerged from the period stronger than ever before. In 1934, faced by a Customs Tariff Commission eager to pare away the tariff and

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91. CWCMA Memorandum...op.cit., p.12.

92. Wage Board Report: Clothing Manufacturing Industry, 23 February 1928 Annexure 398 - 1927-8.

93. Wage Board Report, period ended February 1928 op.cit., paragraph 303.

94. CWCMA Minutes: 19 March 1928 - M2/1.

95. Wage Board Report, period ended February 1928 op.cit., paragraph 304.

96. Letter from Laite to J.H. Munnik, MLA (sic), 29 March 1928 (CCI Archives).

97. Government Gazette 8 June 1928.

aggressive Transvaal attempts to force an increase in the coastal wages, the Cape manufacturers then showed not the least sign of panic. Edgar Jacobs said:

...the clothing industry, being next to the gold mining industry, the largest industry in the country, had little to fear that its position would be prejudiced.<sup>98</sup>

Such strength and confidence did not, of course, attend the industry immediately the wage determination was gazetted, nor was the Wage Board the only leavening agent. But a concentration on the the Wage Board's activities allows the other factors to be seen in perspective, while at the same time permitting judgement on the real effects of the Wage Act on the clothing industry.

Depite the manufacturers' statements that the new wages were impossible, many immediately showed signs of observing the determination. The members of the CWCMA placed a joint order with Messrs. Jagger for seats with backrests made compulsory in the determination. They had several meetings with labour inspectors and the Wage Board itself to obtain clarity on the interpretation of the determination.<sup>99</sup> The bulk of discussion in the CWCMA meetings concerned the implementation of the determination. Moves were made to find legal loopholes in the law and to secure exemption from paying less efficient employees the minimum wage, but there was clearly a determined effort to comply with aspects of the new law. Some workers were dismissed, as parts of the industry adapted to the determination, but this trend was offset by the engagement of new learners.<sup>100</sup>

The Garment Workers' Union meanwhile had fallen on bad times. Without the constant support of the manufacturers and participation in an industrial council, the Union could offer nothing to

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98. CWCMA Minutes: 15 October 1934 - M2/1.

99. CWCMA Minutes: 31 August 1928; 11 October 1928 - M2/1.

100. Laite refused to estimate the number of dismissals but denied he had mentioned a figure as large as 400 (Cape Times 10 July 1928). The Divisional Inspector of Labour reported that 254 workers were discharged because of the determination and 143 new learners were engaged, reducing the total number of employed clothing workers from 2039 to 1945. (Letter to the Secretary for Labour, c.19 July 1928 S.A.B. ARB1069/22)

the workers and membership evaporated. Stuart was succeeded as secretary by Henry Evans, from the Bakers' Union, and one B.W. Poole took over as chairman.<sup>101</sup> Poole and Evans spent the next six years vainly asking the manufacturers to form an industrial council. The CFLU was used to bargaining on behalf of skilled workers in craft unions. Such workers were in a position of some power by virtue of the scarcity of their labour and their key positions in the labour process. They were relatively few in number and easy to organize. The CFLU did not appreciate that the unionization of the masses of less skilled or unskilled industrial workers required a different form of organization. The organization of unskilled garment workers - even those grouped into large factories - was beyond their experience. Still less part of their experience was the strong organization such a union would need and the militant policy it would have to follow if it were to make any impression on the bosses. The Industrial Conciliation Act served to blur the difference between craft unionism and industrial unionism. Wages were negotiated in an industrial council on which the CFLU advised all workers instead of just the skilled workers. An industrial council was the immediate and final objective of the 'leaders' of the garment workers. The formation of an industrial council would secure for them the members they could not organize and the subscriptions they could not hope to collect voluntarily.

The Department of Labour and the Wage Board joined the officials of the Union in urging the formation of an industrial council.<sup>102</sup> Such a council could not introduce lower wages but it would control the administration of the determination, including the granting of exemptions. Experience in other industries under wage determinations had demonstrated the inability of understaffed local labour inspectorates to police determinations. The Department of Labour wished this work to be undertaken by the industries

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101. Poole was a recent English immigrant. He was more a factory manager than a garment worker and was the author of a successful text book on cutting (Poole, 1927). He was chairman of the GWU-CP until 1936 when he became the first agent of the industrial council.

102. CWCMA Minutes: 11 October 1928 - M2/1.

themselves.

The basic attitude of the clothing employers to these suggestions of a council remained unaltered until 1935. They would not form an industrial council unless the Minister agreed to gazette an agreement that incorporated lower wages than in the determination.<sup>103</sup> The Minister refused to give such an undertaking<sup>104</sup> and so the industry remained under the Wage Board.

After the wage determination had been in operation for a year, the attitude of the CWCMA to the Wage Board had changed radically. Conditions in the industry had improved in this period. Jacobs stated that,

...(the determination) had increased the efficiency of his employees, and he was now getting an increased output at a lower cost per unit under the conditions laid down by the Wage Board...<sup>105</sup>

Roytowski,

...said that as far as he, personally, was concerned it had worked admirably...and (he) was not in favour of setting up an Industrial Council as he was unable to see any advantages which would accrue.<sup>106</sup>

Laite remarked that,

...the Clothing Manufacturers were the first set of employers he had known to have actually expressed themselves as satisfied with a Wage Board Determination...<sup>107</sup>

An important effect of the wage scale structure on the determination was obvious after this first year of operation. The determination had led to an increase in labour turnover in the industry<sup>108</sup>

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103. CWCMA Minutes: 21 January 1929 - M2/1.

104. Secretary for Labour to Laite, c.25 January 1929 S.A.B. ARB1058/27; CWCMA Minutes: 27 June 1929 - M2/1.

105. CWCMA Minutes: 27 June 1929 - M2/1.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

108. "...the labour turnover in the industry was greater under the Determination, due mainly to the periodical increases in wages..." ibid.



and to a great increase in the proportion of juvenile employees.

The wages of learners were set to increase periodically. Women beginners in the industry, for example, were entitled to a minimum wage of 15/- a week. After one year's experience this had risen (by degrees) to 22/6 and after three years' experience to 40/- a week. (See Table 4.2 below) The most efficient of workers might be kept on until she was due for the qualified wage of 40/-, but a less efficient worker was fired as soon as an employer thought she could not earn the increased wage to which she was entitled by virtue of having however many months of experience.<sup>109</sup> The dismissed worker was replaced by a new beginner who would, in turn, be fired as soon as her employer estimated that her efficiency did not warrant the extra cost of adding to her wage the increment prescribed by the wage determination.<sup>110</sup>

Employers could pay lower wages than those specified to old or physically handicapped workers who were issued with an 'exemption certificate' by the Department of Labour. Exemption certificates ought not to have been given to able-bodied workers.

Because lower wages could be paid to learners, clothing factories rationalised their labour processes by splitting up work into simple tasks which workers could learn to do efficiently in a short period. The three year learnership period was a gift of up to two years or more of cheap labour. The wage structure set by the determinations thus encouraged a higher labour turnover and therationalisation of the labour process.

As the minimum wage to which a worker was entitled depended on the amount of his or her experience in the Cape clothing industry as a whole and not experience in a particular factory, manufacturers sought out beginners or workers with relatively little experience. Beginners, naturally, tended to be relatively young. So the wage structure of the determinations led to a growing proportion of young workers in the industry. This process

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109. Some factories operated a piecework system and were thus able to determine this ability 'objectively'.

110. "...many employees are dismissed on reaching the wage of £2..." Wage Board Report: Clothing Manufacturing Industry, 25 November 1931 Annexure 194 - 1931-2.

is particularly evident in the case of "juvenile" women workers (those younger than 21 years of age). The following employment figures were collected by the Wage Board. Table 4.1a gives figures for all Cape clothing factories and Table 4.1b figures only for factories that existed both in 1926 and 1929.

Table 4.1: Employment in the Cape Town Clothing Industry, 1926 and 1929<sup>111</sup>

	White				Black				TOTAL
	Men		Women		Men		Women		
	A <sup>*</sup>	J <sup>*</sup>	A	J	A	J	A	J	
a) <u>All establishments:</u>									
February 1926	43	12	40	47	180	50	364	369	1 105
February 1929	55	24	82	301	212	87	448	814	2 023
b) <u>Certain establishments:</u>									
February 1926	42	12	29	22	148	29	314	314	910
February 1929	39	19	63	161	146	63	322	591	1 404

\*A - Adult J - Juvenile (younger than 21)

In 1926 there was almost an equal number of adult and juvenile women workers, and in 1929 juveniles made up two thirds of the workforce. (This is true also for factories that existed both in 1926 and 1929.)

Towards the end of 1929, the Cape clothing manufacturers experienced a "tremendous drop in demand"<sup>112</sup> for their output

111. Wage Board Report: Work of the Board for the three years ending February 1928 op.cit., paragraphs 313, 314.

112. CWCMA Minutes: 30 December 1929 - M2/1.

as imports flooded the market. Competition was keener than at any time since 1925.<sup>113</sup> It was decided to ask for an increase in the tariff. The Board of Trade found several firms to be trading at a loss<sup>114</sup> and, because of the unfavourable international conditions, the tariff was raised 5%.<sup>115</sup> The position of the industry improved, but by mid-1930 general economic conditions were worsening and the CWCMA decided to make an appeal to the Wage Board. They wanted wage minima reduced, the ratio clause abolished and the learnership period extended to four years.<sup>116</sup>

Before this request was made, Evans of the GWU-CP met with the CWCMA and suggested the formation of an industrial council. An industrial council would be able to enforce the legal wages rigidly and end the 'unfair competition' that existed in the industry because of the evasion of the determination.<sup>117</sup> Another enticement was that,

...Mr. Evans stated that the employees' representatives would be agreeable to a reduction of wages, provided they were satisfied such reduction would be in the best interests of employees.<sup>118</sup>

Evans agreed to write to the Minister and to ask for,

...his assurance that he would be prepared to gazette an agreement mutually arrived at after negotiations between representatives of this Association and the Trade Union.<sup>119</sup>

Without consulting the Union, the CWCMA sent its proposed new wage scales to the Secretary for Labour asking if they were acceptable for an industrial council agreement.<sup>120</sup> The reply was in

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113. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence 1935. Jacobs, p.3466.

114. Ibid., p.3465.

115. It was not increased to enable manufacturers to pay the wages set by the determination, although this was stated by the CWCMA representatives before the Customs Tariff Commission in 1935. See Board of Trade and Industries: Report 107 Annexure 427 - 1930.

116. CWCMA Minutes: 5 August 1930 - M2/1.

117. CWCMA Minutes: 4 September 1930 - M2/1.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.

120. Letter from Laite to the Secretary for Labour, 4 October 1930 S.A.B. ARB1058/27. See Table 4.2 column 6.

the negative.<sup>121</sup> Evans proposed wages that were still lower than those of the CWCMA<sup>122</sup>, but they could not be taken advantage of because of the Minister's attitude. The Wage Board was asked to intervene and soon began a new investigation.<sup>123</sup>

The depression intensified from the middle of 1931. Three medium sized clothing factories closed down<sup>124</sup> and all the others were on short time and retrenching workers every week.<sup>125</sup> Japanese competition was cited as the main cause of the depressed state of the industry.<sup>126</sup> Recognising the seriousness of the position, the Department of Labour suspended all increments due under the determination and gave the Divisional Inspectors wider powers to issue individual exemptions in an effort to prevent more unemployment.<sup>127</sup>

In this context the Wage Board issued a draft recommendation. It was not well received by the CWCMA. Roytowski protested that,

...instead of a reduction, the new proposals represented an appreciable increase in labour costs.<sup>128</sup>

The manufacturers were hurled into still greater chaos when Britain left the gold standard and a devalued sterling led to deluge of cheap imports. Meetings to draft objections to the Wage Board

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121. Letter from Walker to CWCMA, 29 October 1930 S.A.B. ARB1058/27 "...it would be impossible to hold that it is not substantially less favourable to the general body of employees than are the terms of the determination". Section 7(5) of the Wage Act stipulated that a new industrial council agreement could not be less favourable to workers than an existing wage determination.

122. CWCMA Minutes: 12 March 1931 - M2/1; see Table 4.2 column 7.

123. CWCMA Minutes: 6 March 1931 (Shirt Section) - M2/1.

124. Letter from Roytowski to the Minister of Labour, 23 June 1931 S.A.B. ARB1069/22.

125. Letter from the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, to the Secretary for Labour, 4 July 1931 S.A.B. ARB1069/22.

126. Ibid.; CWCMA Minutes: 24 July 1931 (Shirt Section) - M2/1.

127. CWCMA Minutes: 1 September 1931; 12 October 1931 - M2/1.

128. CWCMA Minutes: 7 September 1931 - M2/1.

recommendation were cancelled as all attention was diverted onto the tariff issue. The crisis persuaded the Wage Board to amend its proposals. The recommendation then made was substantially that proposed by the CWCMA, although the Board refused to reduce the minimum qualified wage from 40 to 35 shillings per week.<sup>129</sup>

Although the Wage Board recommended a reduction in some wages and no wages were increased, its new recommendation continued the effort to end large regional wage disparities in the clothing industry. For the first time the recommendation covered the whole country.<sup>130</sup> The Board advised that,

In an industry so highly competitive as clothing, it is not only desirable but imperative that the provisions of wage regulating instruments should, subject to slight differentiation to meet local conditions be, as far as possible, identical.<sup>131</sup>

The Rand manufacturers were in an extremely unsatisfactory position as they were forced to pay higher wages than elsewhere. On the other hand coastal manufacturers complained that the wages of African male pressers in the Transvaal were not regulated. The Wage Board wanted to establish one wage regulating system. This would also protect Transvaal workers if the industrial council agreement was not renewed.<sup>132</sup>

The CWCMA were distraught that the qualified wage of £2 per week had not been reduced. They told the Wage Board that,

Considering the class of labour, its mentality, its general inefficiency and irresponsibility, employers feel that the figure of £1.15.0. per week is a generous one to fix as the minimum wage for qualified female

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129. Wage Board Report: Bespoke Tailoring and Clothing Manufacturing Industries, 23 October 1931 Annexure 82 - 1931-2.

130. The terms of reference were extended by the Minister after a request from the Wage Board in its Report on the Bespoke Tailoring and Clothing Manufacturing Industries, 20 July 1931 Annexure 56 - 1931-2.

131. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931 op.cit.

132. In 1927 the Transvaal manufacturers threatened to refuse renewal of the agreement. Wages would then have been subject to no legal minimum as Wage Determination No.2 excluded the Witwatersrand.

employees.<sup>133</sup>

By January 1932, conditions were "infinitely worse" and all members of the CWCMA felt it "absolutely essential that this wage be reduced". £1.15.0. was "the absolute maximum the industry was economically able to pay as a minimum wage".<sup>134</sup> The manufacturers had prepared a budget,

...showing that a female employee in receipt of £1.15.0. a week would be able to maintain herself and have a little in hand at the end of the year.<sup>135</sup>

The Board commented,

It may be possible for a woman to maintain herself on £1.15.0. per week, but the standard would be very low indeed.<sup>136</sup>

In support of retaining a £2 minimum, the Wage Board cited evidence given by the CWCMA itself. The manufacturers had stated that economic pressure had forced "a better class of employee" into the industry. One manufacturer said,

I consider that the last determination was responsible for putting the shirt industry on its feet. It enabled factories to attract much better types of people.<sup>137</sup>

The worst of the depression was over when Wage Determination No.42 was gazetted in April 1932.<sup>138</sup> It attended on a new wave of expansion. The Cape clothing industry flourished as never before. But the revival of the economy brought with it new problems for the clothing manufacturers. The chief of these was competition from Cut, Make and Trim (CMT) factories.

CMT establishments emerge in every boom. They meet the excess demand for clothes which the existing factories have not the stocks

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133. Wage Board Report: Clothing Manufacturing Industry, 18 March 1932 Annexure 469 - 1931-2.

134. CWCMA Minutes: 7 January 1932 - M2/1.

135. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931 op.cit., paragraph 7.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Government Gazette 22 April 1932; see Table 4.2 column 8.

or capacity to meet. As such they might be given cloth by large factories which do not want to disappoint customers. But CMT establishments can obviously compete with other factories - and have an unfair advantage because of their low overhead costs. They kept no stocks of cloth or finished clothes, they often rented machinery and factory space on a short time basis, they were less than scrupulous in paying minimum wages. As soon as they took work from cloth importers or clothing retailers they posed a threat to all clothing factories. The Customs Tariff Act allowed clothing manufacturers a rebate on the duty imposed on imported textiles - this was the case with all cloth as the local textile industry hardly existed before the War. After the depression, some wholesale merchants set up factories which operated as CMT establishments. A retailer could buy cloth under rebate and have it made up in the factory.<sup>139</sup> Nothing prevented individuals from setting up shop and competing for this business. The Wage Board stated that competition allowed merchants to hawk rolls of material from one CMT factory to another.

Eventually prices are so low as to make it impossible for anything but sweated wages to be paid.<sup>140</sup>

The "legitimate manufacturers" in the Transvaal and Cape protested against,

...the encroachment of persons having no stake or responsibility in the industry other than a selfish motive.<sup>141</sup>

They wanted the Board of Trade to allow the rebated duty on raw materials only to "bona fide manufacturers" and not to "every tinpot importer calling himself a manufacturer".<sup>142</sup>

...(T)he small man who starts up with a few machines usually on the hire purchase system, is practically without responsibility, undercuts to the lowest possible

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139. Wage Board Report: Garment Making Trades, 12 April 1935  
Annexure 99 - 1936, paragraph 28.

140. Ibid., paragraph 29.

141. CWCMA Minutes: 19 February 1934 - M2/1.

142. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence 1935, p.3178 (Laite).

margin, evades all wage regulations, is a complete menace to the industry and eventually fails.<sup>143</sup>

The CWCMA supported a Transvaal proposal that only registered clothing factories be allowed a rebate. The criterion for registration was to be the use of fifty machines,

...with the stipulation that the said machines must be the manufacturer's own property and not obtained on the Hire Purchase System.<sup>144</sup>

One manufacturer objected that this was too large a number as a factory with fifty machines would "employ a very large number of hands, say from 80 to 90".

The Secretary pointed out that this would limit the number of manufacturers which was what was wanted.<sup>145</sup>

No firm action was taken by the Board of Trade or the Department of Labour to limit the bad effects of CMT factories. Indeed their emergence was further stimulated by the invalidation of important aspects of the wage determination in two court cases in 1933 and 1934. The first judgement<sup>146</sup> declared ultra vires the clauses of the determination which discouraged manufacturers from operating a piecework system. This meant that no minimum wage had to be paid to pieceworkers and, said the chairman of the CWCMA,

...if a factory was employing every one of its work-people on a piecework basis, the factory owner would be within his rights in refusing to allow Factory Inspectors to enter his establishment.<sup>147</sup>

The second judgement, a year after, declared the entire determination invalid.<sup>148</sup>

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143. CWCMA Minutes: 19 February 1934 - M2/1.

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid. The adoption of this suggestion shows clearly that the CWCMA at this time consisted exclusively of the larger clothing factories.

146. Rex v. Cohen (25 October 1933, NPD) and (22 May 1934, AD, 521). The appeal of the state was dismissed.

147. CWCMA Minutes: 15 October 1934 - M2/1.

148. Rex v. Ryba (14 December 1934, TPD).



Many Cape Town employers immediately adopted a piecework system and some set piecework rates,

which brought back in their factories the old sweated conditions which prevailed in this trade before there was any wage regulation.<sup>149</sup>

The invalidation of the determination brought "terrible and appalling" conditions to the Durban clothing industry. However members of the CWCMA immediately agreed to uphold the determination. They assured the Department of Labour and the Garment Workers' Union that "they would continue to carry out the Determination No.42 in the same manner as prior to the judgement".<sup>150</sup> Evans, of the GWU-CP,

...said this action on the part of the employers showed that the better class of employer was endeavouring to carry on the trade in a mutually beneficial manner.<sup>151</sup>

He did not let the opportunity slide to suggest the formation of an industrial council with,

...an Agreement that could be rigidly enforced [against] those employers...who would take advantage of the recent decision of the Court...<sup>152</sup>

Jacobs objected that,

...too much attention was being paid to those employers who it was alleged would take advantage of the decision of the Court to underpay employees. He considered that the majority of employers in the Clothing Industry were members of the Association, and those who were not were a negligible quantity.<sup>153</sup>

When Evans replied that he was most anxious about trouble from the CMT workshops,

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149. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 17.

150. CWCMA Minutes: 28 May 1934 - M2/1.

151. Ibid.

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid.

Mr. Roytowski...contended that the employers in the C.M.T. trade who would not...carry out the terms of the Determination since the decision of the Court would not have been in the habit of doing so before the decision.<sup>154</sup>

The government later passed the Wage Determination Validation Act (No.16 of 1935) which reinstated determination No.42, but the above discussion suggests that the bulk of Cape clothing manufacturers were content to observe important parts of the determination voluntarily. They were happy with the determination as it stood. Despite their complaints that too many exemptions were refused or not renewed, and that the Department of Labour was unable to curtail the CMT factories,<sup>155</sup>

...the general opinion of Clothing Manufacturers was that the present Determination was functioning satisfactorily.<sup>156</sup>

In late 1934, the industry was in "a very prosperous condition". It had "expanded at an exceedingly rapid rate", and was holding its own against foreign competition.<sup>157</sup> Six years with the Wage Board had removed the manufacturers' early fear and resentment of wage regulation. Asked by the Customs Tariff Commission if they did not consider Wage Board awards in favour of "reputable employers", Middlemass replied simply, "We like them".<sup>158</sup> Jacobs said he had no wish to go back to the "old days",

I would not remain in the industry if we had to employ sweated labour.<sup>159</sup>

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154. CWCMA Minutes: 28 May 1934 - M2/1.

155. CWCMA Minutes: 28 May 1934; 30 January 1935 - M2/1;  
Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3472.

156. CWCMA Minutes: 15 October 1934 - M2/1.

157. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraphs 10-12.

158. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3482.

159. Ibid.

This section of the chapter has so far set out the history of wage regulation in the Cape clothing industry from 1928 to 1934. It has stressed how the members of the CWCMA, the (relatively) 'good' employers, changed their methods of operation to adapt to the determinations and has pointed to the difficulties they faced in the depression, competition from CMT factories and the invalidation of Determination No.42. The great expansion of the industry despite all these setbacks confirmed the manufacturers' good opinion of the Wage Board. We now need to look more closely at why the clothing manufacturers were able to be so satisfied with the Wage Board. First we shall show that the determinations were observed even more selectively than we have suggested and demonstrate that they were not enforced by the Department of Labour. Then we shall suggest why manufacturers made the (still great) efforts they did to observe even part of the determinations if they were not legally enforced. The next part of this section will also describe some of the experiences of garment workers during the period that the industry came under the Wage Board.

Members of the CWCMA did observe important parts of the determinations and in most cases altered their operations to take account of its requirements. Other employers, particularly those in the CMT branch of production and at the lower end of the trade, were prone to evade or ignore the determination. They observed it only as a matter of chance.<sup>160</sup> Even the efforts of 'reputable' employers to adapt to the determination were not without their limits. The practice of dismissing learners as they became due for higher wages<sup>161</sup> was not in itself a contravention of the determination, although it was against the spirit of the Wage Act. But employers were legally obliged to maintain a ratio between the number of unqualified and qualified workers. Cape employers repeatedly complained about the impossibility of the ratio provision and some openly admitted ignoring it.<sup>162</sup> In 1935 Cape Town

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160. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, pp.3469-72; CWCMA Minutes: 28 May 1934; 15 October 1934; 5 March 1934 - M2/1.

161. See p.195 above; Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraphs 42; 52.

162. Ibid., paragraphs 40-41.

had the lowest proportion of qualified employees in the country.<sup>163</sup> Where employers did pay attention to the ratio, they often tried to get exemption from paying certain of their workers increased wages. On occasion workers who were not physically disabled, but rather "naturally slow"<sup>164</sup>, were told by their employer that they could only be kept on if an exemption were granted. In this situation,

...applicants themselves put up a very strong plea to be allowed to work at a reduced rate, as, otherwise, they are faced with the prospect of unemployment.<sup>165</sup>

It is impossible even to estimate how far the determinations were observed. This certainly varied considerably over time and between 'good' and 'bad' employers. What is clear, however, is that the wage determinations were never properly enforced by the Department of Labour. From the outset, the Department of Labour was eager to have industrial councils formed to police the first determination. The Department was simply "not properly adapted for the work".<sup>166</sup> It was always understaffed and never able to undertake systematic inspections of industries governed by determinations.<sup>167</sup> Clothing manufacturers appreciated that,

...employers would be troubled more by the agent of an Industrial Council than they were by the Labour Inspectors who were now seeing that the Wage Determination was being carried out.<sup>168</sup>

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163. The proportion set by Wage Determination No.42 was 25%. Cape Town had 21% of its female machinists earning at least the qualified wage, Durban 23%, Johannesburg 37%, Germiston 32% and Pretoria 42%. (Ibid., paragraph 42).

164. CWCMA Minutes: 30 January 1935 - M2/1.

165. Cape Federation of Labour Unions Official Organ September 1937.

166. Advisory Council of Labour: Minutes, 5th Session, October 1925, p.18 S.A.B. ARB1701.

167. The point is strongly made in Laite (1947, p.232) with respect to determinations generally. It is made for Cape Town in a letter from the Divisional Inspector, Cape Town to the Secretary for Labour, 29 January 1929 (S.A.B. ARB1058/27).

168. CWCMA Minutes: 27 June 1929 - M2/1.

This was one of the reasons they declined to be drawn into an industrial council. Looking back in 1934, a Cape Federation propagandist said of the clothing industry:

The risk of departmental control under the machinery of the Wage Act - admittedly ineffective and incapable of cleaning up any industry - was preferred (to the) efficient policing of the factories by Agents competent by reason of their practical knowledge of the trade. With calculating cuteness (the employers realized) the possibility of escape and evasion from the penalties of infringement through the sparse supply of Industrial Inspectors administering a plethora of Determinations.<sup>169</sup>

In 1929 a "factory worker" stated in a letter to the Cape Argus that the clothing determination was not observed by employers and that Labour Inspectors were easily "hoodwinked" into believing it was.<sup>170</sup> Clever employers faked their wage registers<sup>171</sup> and threatened workers with dismissal if they denied they were paid their due wage when questioned. The Department of Labour described such a situation where workers 'willingly' accepted wages below the minimum as "collusion".<sup>172</sup>

During the depression, short-time, retrenchments, the suspension of increments and the liberal issue of exemption certificates kept wages specially low.<sup>173</sup> "Glaring and flagrant" contraventions

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169. "Methods Most Foul" (TUCSA Archives, Ad. 4.11). This document is written in prose which is garish even by Federation standards. I have altered the syntax, without affecting the meaning. ("Methods Most Foul" was submitted to the 1934 Industrial Legislation Commission by the CFLU).

170. Cape Argus 28 January 1929.

171. See CWCMA Minutes: 10 November 1927 - M2/1.

172. Annual Report 1933 (UG 43-1934) p.37; Rex v. De Freitas and 2 Others: Cape Supreme Court: Criminal Appeals 2 (79) 1936: Evidence of R. Beattie, Divisional Inspector of Labour (C.A.D.)

173. Letters from John Gomas (S.A. Garment Workers' Union, Cape Town) to E.S. Sachs, 24 June 1931; 15 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives); Cape Federation of Labour Unions: Annual Report 1931, pp.12-13; Stuart (1950i).

of the determination were reported to the Department of Labour but no prosecutions followed.<sup>174</sup> The CFLU stated that exemptions,

...were obtained by methods of a questionable character, such as inducing employees during working hours to sign forms agreeing to accept these exemptions from the Wage rates - a form of mental duress, despicable and cruel because enacted on girls and women who because of the suggestive action of their minds fear losing their jobs.<sup>175</sup>

The non-enforcement of the determination was regularly given by the Garment Workers' Union as one of the reasons it desired an industrial council.<sup>176</sup> The CWCMA accepted such assertions until Evans stated, at a meeting in 1935, that at least 25 per cent of the firms were not observing the determination. The manufacturers said that a Labour Inspector put the figure at 5 per cent. Jacobs felt Evans' claim to be exaggerated. He said that 80 per cent of the workers were employed by "about 15 reputable firms" and that it was only the CMT factories which caused the trouble. Evans disagreed.<sup>177</sup>

The figures in possession of the Union were based on well-founded and serious complaints made by employees. Many cases of underpayment or illegal working conditions never reached the ears of the Labour Department at all because most employees stood in terror of losing their jobs if they made a complaint...(I)t was generally known that if a complaint was made by an employee to the Department of Labour, the name of the employee was almost invariably divulged to the employer by the Labour Inspector.<sup>178</sup>

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174. Letter from Sachs to the Secretary, S.A. Trades and Labour Council, 28 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

175. "Methods Most Foul" op.cit.

176. CWCMA Minutes: 13 January 1930; 4 September 1930; 28 May 1934; 5 May 1935 - M2/1; Garment Workers' Union Commission of Inquiry 1949: Minutes of Evidence, p.116 - Rose Crawford examined (GWUSA Archives Bce 4). Non-enforcement of clothing industry wage determinations is specifically referred to in CFLU Annual Reports of 1928, 1931 and 1932.

177. CWCMA Minutes: 5 March 1935 - M2/1.

178. Ibid.

This description of the situation is supported and extended by letters, speeches and memoranda emanating from the Transvaal garment workers' union which began an intensive organizing drive in Cape Town in 1934. Solly Sachs wrote that

The vast majority of the workers do not even receive the miserable rates provided in the determination, and large numbers of workers earn as little as 5/- per week... The administration of the determination which is in the hands of the department of labour is, to say the least, damnable!...(S)o far there have been no prosecutions...although the violations are flagrant and run into thousands.<sup>179</sup>

Sachs organized an investigation of the wages and conditions of Cape Town clothing workers. He collected statements from workers which revealed "wholesale and flagrant violations of the laws of the country, involving unlawful underpayment of wages to workers amounting to thousands of pounds".<sup>180</sup> The strident allegations of the non-enforcement of the determination by the Department of Labour<sup>181</sup> were not publicly challenged by the Department or the CWCMA.

The Transvaal garment workers' union stated in evidence to the Industrial Legislation Commission in 1934:

It is no exaggeration to state that Wage Board determinations are observed only as far as it suits the employers on whom they are binding.<sup>182</sup>

In this context, the 1934 undertaking of the CWCMA to carry out

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179. Letter from Sachs to Bill Andrews, 9 November 1934 (GWUSA Archives).

180. 'Memorandum Submitted to the Honourable the Minister of Justice Regarding the Non-Enforcement of Determination No.42 and Determination No.44 Cape.', 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

181. In addition to the sources cited above, see, for example: The Sun 15 February 1935; 22 November 1935. Forward 13 September 1935. Report of Comrade E. Weinberg to the first general members' meeting of the S.A. Garment Workers' Union, 3 June 1935 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4).

182. Memorandum submitted to the Industrial Legislation Commission by the Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal), September 1934.

determination No.42 "in the same manner as before the judgement"<sup>183</sup> which made it legally invalid, appears less magnanimous. But even if the determination was observed only selectively, it is nonetheless significant that Cape garment manufacturers voluntarily followed the lead of the Wage Board. For the fact that they followed this lead (and also the extent to which they followed it) is revealing of the conditions of class struggle in the clothing industry in Cape Town.

The forces which stilled the manufacturers' initial opposition to the wage determinations were on the one hand 'ideological' and on the other 'practical'. The civilized labour policy was a key element in the strategy of the Pact government. Part of its aim was to provide employment at 'civilized wages' for less-skilled white workers. Government spokesmen stated that the granting of tariff protection to industry was conditional on the increase of white employment in the industries which benefited from it.<sup>184</sup> The Wage Board declared its intention of rooting out sweating and unfair competition against 'good' employers. These intentions were expressed from positions of objective weakness - but the clothing manufacturers were not then to know this. Their first adaptations to the determination were no venture of faith but a response to threats of coercion.

Higher wages (and later the depression) brought a "better class of employee" into the industry.<sup>185</sup> This factor, coupled with intensive training<sup>186</sup>, greatly improved worker efficiency. As was the case in Britain after the Tailoring Trades Board began work, the payment of higher wages encouraged the better management of factories, a rationalization of production and the use of more machinery. The subdivision of tasks was first encouraged

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183. CWCMA Minutes: 28 May 1934 - M2/1.

184. Cape Times 11 July 1928; Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3207. Also see Kaplan (1976, p.87).

185. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3476; Return of A. Fraser & Co.; Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931 op.cit., paragraph 7.

186. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3166; Return of A. Fraser & Co.



by the structure of the wage scale in the determinations.<sup>187</sup>  
 In 1931 the Wage Board remarked on the 'sectionalisation' of work that had occurred in larger clothing factories. A single shirt passed through the hands of twelve workers. The Board implied that as work was so sectionalized, a full three year learning period was unnecessary.<sup>188</sup> Subdivision was further developed with the widespread adoption of piecework after the Cohen judgement in 1934. Simpler tasks had lower piece rates to force workers to exert themselves more to earn the 'minimum' weekly wage.<sup>189</sup> Changes in the labour process were described by Cape clothing manufacturers to the Customs Tariff Commission in 1934.<sup>190</sup> Jacobs said:

...five years ago one girl made the whole garment.  
 A shirt hand made the whole shirt and a pyjama hand made the whole pair of pyjamas. Today the work is subdivided into definite operations. (p.3166)

Other manufacturers said that their factories were run on much the same basis as those in England. Operators specialised in one particular operation to fit in with the specialised machinery used. They stated that their machinery was the most modern available. Middlemass said,

The local representative of Singers went overseas and when he came back...he told me, 'Your factories are

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187. See p.195 above.

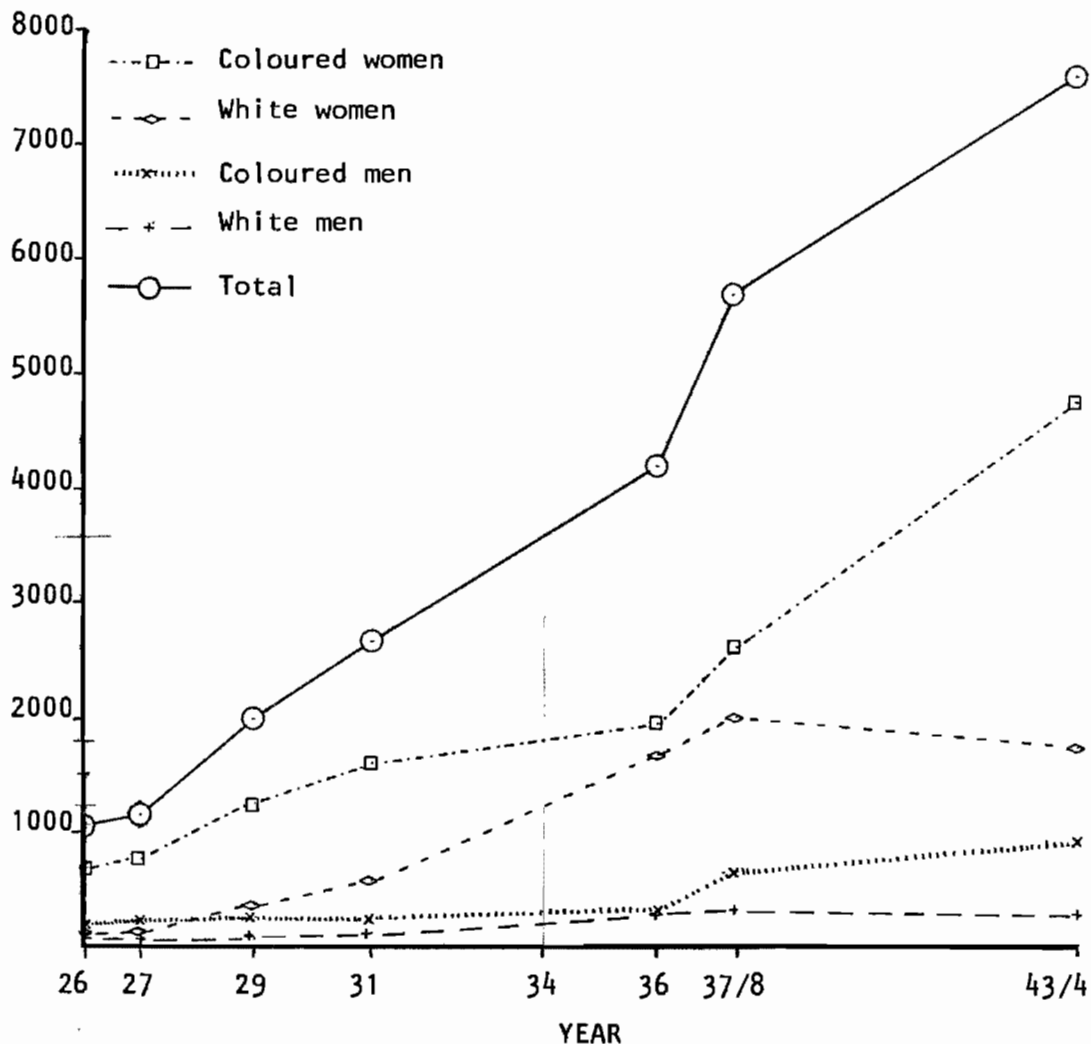
188. Wage Board Report, 25 November 1931 op.cit.

189. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraphs 17; 27; 47.

190. The dangers of accepting at face value the evidence given by organized bodies to Commissions are indicated in Laite's instructions to the Cape clothing manufacturers. "(I)t behooved manufacturers to put forward every item of information which would be likely to convince the Commission that a protective policy was vitally necessary for the welfare of the Industries of the country. They would have to show that under the protective regime there was an increase of civilized labour employed, an increase of capital invested in their particular business, increased wages paid, and so on". (CWCMA Minutes: 15 October 1934 - M2/1).

better equipped than 80% of the factories in Great Britain', that shows we keep up-to-date.<sup>191</sup>

Graph 4.1: Employment by Race in the Cape Town Clothing Industry, 1925 - 1941



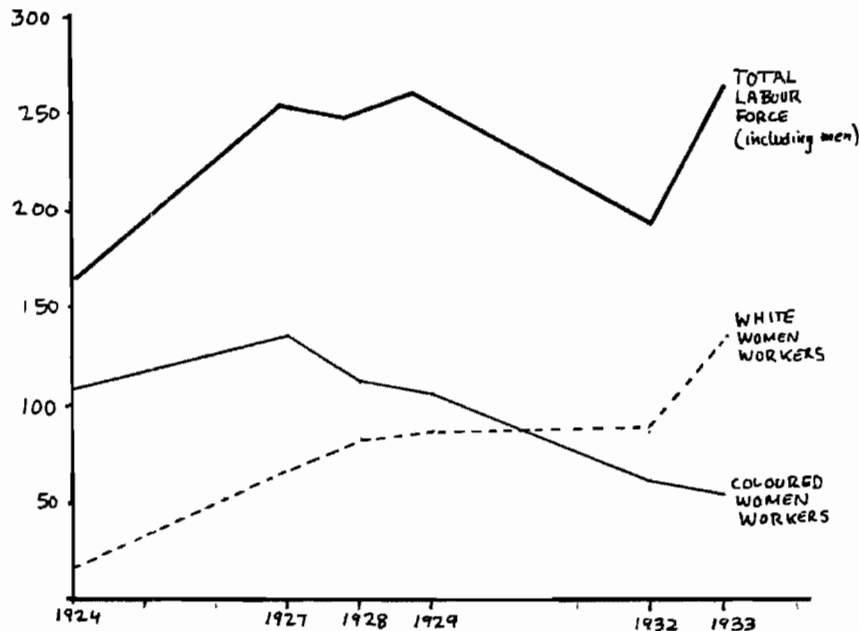
In the following year the Wage Board reported that electric cloth cutting knives were widely used and that many factories were substituting Hoffman steam presses for the heavy 14 lb. irons then

191. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3509g.

in use. These increased output by a factor of five.<sup>192</sup> African Clothing was the first factory in Cape Town to introduce a conveyor belt. In about 1932 a conveyor system was installed which produced sixty pairs of trousers in fifty-five minutes. The belt stopped for five minutes every hour to give workers a rest.<sup>193</sup>

From the late 1920's until the late 1930's there was a great influx of white women into the Cape clothing industry. White women had barely been employed at all in the clothing industry in 1926. In 1934 they made up 40% of the female workforce and this proportion was growing (see Graph 4.1 above).

Graph 4.2: Employment of Women Workers at A. Fraser & Co.,  
1924 - 1933<sup>194</sup>



192. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 50.

193. Interview with David Lunn, 8 July 1978. Lunn assisted a mechanic to instal this conveyor while he was a worker at the factory. He states that the Cape factories were then very advanced and bought all the newest American machines.

194. Customs Tariff Commission: Return of A. Fraser & Co. Far fewer men were employed but the change in the racial composition of the male labour force follows the same pattern as that for women workers.

White women moved into the clothing factories partly because the improved wages made the work more attractive<sup>195</sup>, partly because the depression closed other avenues of employment, and partly because several factories developed a policy of employing white workers. This was specially true of the shirt factories. Monat & Co. employed only white women from its foundation in 1926.<sup>196</sup> Fraser & Co. began to give preference to white workers in 1927. The dramatic results of this policy are illustrated above (Graph 4.2).

The only reason indicated for the preference given to white workers was the request of the government that industry, and specially industry enjoying tariff protection and firms applying for government contracts, should employ more whites.<sup>197</sup> The Cape manufacturers never described white workers as being more efficient than coloured workers or indeed as being a 'division' of the workforce.<sup>198</sup> Their concern was more with learners and qualified workers; with slow and efficient workers than with 'white' and 'coloured' workers - all of whom received the same wages and worked side-by-side under the same conditions.

It would, of course, be wrong to explain the evasion of the determination only by reference to the failings of the Labour Department.<sup>199</sup> Workers could also organize and use the law to

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195. See Cape Times 22 January 1929 "Girl Shirt Makers in Cape Town - Pleasant work under good conditions".

196. Customs Tariff Commission: Return of Monat & Co.; Interview with Edgar Jacobs.

197. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.3207. The Cape clothing industry employed a much lower proportion of whites than that of the Transvaal and paid them much lower wages, yet in 1931 the Wage Board reported that the Cape got the bulk of government contracts (Report, 23 October 1931 op.cit., paragraph 6). In 1927, 89% of government clothing contracts had been awarded in the Transvaal (Report, 25 September 1927 op.cit., paragraph 39).

198. In an objection to the 1926 Wage recommendation, Cape employers asked that a lower wage be set for coloured workers as the higher wages would lead to their dismissal. This seems to have been more a ploy to get the Wage Board to set lower wages for a group of workers who shared this fear (see p.170 above) than a serious contention that coloured workers were less efficient. The Wage Board rejected the request. (Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927 op.cit., paragraph 36).

199. H.J. Laite (1947, p.232) states that the Department of Labour responded to criticism of the non-enforcement of determinations by saying "it was never contemplated that sufficient

enforce the prescribed minimum conditions or even force the employers to pay above the minimum. The Transvaal garment workers' union stated:

The first essential in the enforcement of any Wage Regulation is a well organized union of the workers concerned. Without such an organization the Wage Board Determinations and Agreements are barely worth the paper they are written on.<sup>200</sup>

This was asking a lot of workers in the Cape clothing industry who fell under the Wage Board largely because they were not organized. Cape Town garment workers were in no position to make use of the Wage Act. They were unorganized, the registered union was defunct and its 'leaders' were interested only in the formation of an industrial council. The manufacturers' policy of maintaining a high rate of labour turnover made workers extremely insecure in their jobs and specially vulnerable to threats of dismissal. The white labour policy of certain factories weakened the position of coloured workers. In addition there was always an ample supply of the young women workers needed by the industry. In these circumstances, the dominance of the employers went largely unchecked. They could decide for themselves how far they would comply with the intentions of the Wage Board.

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inspectors would be employed to undertake meticulous enforcement, and employers and employees individually and collectively were urged to co-operate with the Department so as to bring about general compliance with wage regulating instruments".

The Minister of Labour said exactly this to W.J. Laite in 1931 (CWCMA Minutes: 11 June 1931 - M2/1). It was then seen as "an entire change of policy". Earlier correspondence and memoranda in the files of the Department of Labour clearly express the wish to administer determinations "systematically". (See, for example, handwritten note by C.W. Cousins, Secretary for Labour, on the letter from the Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, 29 January 1929 S.A.B ARB1058/27).

200. Memorandum submitted to the Industrial Legislative Commission by the Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal), September 1934 (GWUSA Archives).

The wage determinations were generally ignored or evaded by small clothing factories and CMT establishments in Cape Town. But the 'reputable' manufacturers, most of whom belonged to the CWCMA, did observe the determinations, if selectively. They discussed the implementation of determinations, and adapted to them as a group. The determinations were voluntarily applied by CWCMA for several practical reasons which complemented and strengthened the ideological inducements mentioned earlier:

- First, a higher wage level was consistent with the introduction of new machinery and new techniques of production.
- Second, the determinations provided the manufacturers with an agreed wage standard which limited undercutting and unfair competition between one another.
- Third, they found that higher wages could mean lower wage costs if coupled with careful training in performing subdivided tasks and the dismissal of workers as they qualified for higher wages. Unintentionally, the Wage Board led the manufacturers to find new methods of exploitation - by increasing the intensity of labour and the extraction of relative surplus value.
- Fourth, the observation of the determination established them as reputable and responsible pioneers of industrial development - from this position they could count on a sympathetic hearing from government bodies and commissions whose actions affected them.

The Cape clothing manufacturers were impelled to follow the lead of the Wage Board by the conditions of class struggle they confronted. The fact that they did not fully implement the designs of the Wage Board was also decided by the conditions of class struggle - in particular the weakness of labour organization. The precise effects of the Wage Act on the clothing industry in Cape Town thus grew out of the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town.

#### 4 The Significance of the Wage Act

Our interpretation of the working of the Wage Act in the Cape clothing industry throws doubt on some of the arguments used by Davies (1979) to assert the importance of the Wage Act in the policy of the Pact government. For Davies, the great achievement of the Wage Act was to enhance capitalist development in South Africa while assisting to resolve the political problems connected with poor whiteness. He argues this against liberal contentions that the Act was economically irrational as it interfered unnecessarily with the free working of the economy. (p.211, n.88) He points out that the Wage Board always recommended wages close to those already paid by higher wage firms in the industry which employed more whites. These firms tended to be the more mechanized capitals.

...(T)he Wage Board in effect gave a further competitive advantage to those capitals employing more mechanized labour processes and/or compelled other capitals to begin mechanization. (p.214)

...(I)n its attempts to promote white employment through the medium of the Wage Board the State was in effect harmonizing itself with and promoting the trend towards mechanization in South African industry. (pp.213/4)<sup>201</sup>

The forced increase in wages reduced the ability of small manufacturing capitalists to extract surplus value from less mechanized, low-wage labour processes. (p.216) Many of these firms lacked the capital to change and hence collapsed.

Davies' argument about the significance of the Wage Act hinges on the enforcement of determinations against small employers.

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201. Umsebenzi 19 November 1926 makes a similar point: "...most important bosses...support these scales: it is only a question of conforming to the standards found most productive, from the exploiter's point of view, by the more up-to-date capitalists, such as Ford, who moreover will score by the elimination of the more backward firms, lacking the resources or business ability to compete with their advanced rivals. The Wage Board at best attempts to stabilize the conditions of the (capitalistically) most 'enlightened' factories".

Our study of the Cape clothing industry has shown this did not occur in this instance. There is every reason to suppose that enforcement in other industries was equally lacking. Quite apart from the invalidation of many determinations by court judgements (Davies, 1979, pp.211; 216-7), which made legal enforcement impossible, similar ploys were used by employers in other industries to evade determinations and the same shortage of inspectors prevailed.<sup>202</sup> Hansi Pollak carried out an intensive study of several industries on the Witwatersrand in 1931-2. She commented generally on the Wage, Factory and Industrial Conciliation Acts:

The spirit in which the legislation was designed certainly surpassed its practical operation, as the elasticity of its interpretation, the subtle ways and means devised by many industrialists to evade the Acts and the impossibility of vigorous enforcement, due to the numerical inadequacy of the Factory Inspectorate, frequently allow of the persistence of those very conditions which it was the aim of the industrial legislation to eliminate. (Pollak, 1933, p.56)

W.H. Hutt, the distinguished economist<sup>203</sup>, wrote:

It is commonly asserted in casual conversation that evasion (of wage determinations and agreements) takes place on so large a scale that inspectors and other officials are unable to cope with it, and are in a position to prosecute only in exceptional cases. (Hutt, 1935, pp.40-1)

All this calls into question whether the Wage Act had the significance attributed to it by Davies in promoting either the em-

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202. See "Methods Most Foul" op.cit.; Laite (1947, pp.181; 232). Budlender (1979, pp.131-137) summarizes well many of the difficulties surrounding the enforcement of the Wage Act before the Second World War. She does not criticise Davies' argument directly, but her endorsement of it is qualified. "Insofar as it was effectively applied and enforced..., the Act served to encourage the promotion of efficient industry, and the concentration and centralization of industry..." (my emphasis) (p.122).

203. U.C.T. News February 1983.



ployment of white labour or the mechanization of industry. It certainly harmonized with both, but called the tune for neither. Our description of aspects of the Cape clothing industry in the ten years prior to the formation of the first registered industrial council suggests that the Wage Board had a different significance from that attributed to it by Davies, or the liberal commentators.

In the Cape clothing industry, the Wage Act stimulated the organization of the CWCMA and the registration of the Garment Workers' Union. Once the early attempts to form an industrial council had failed, the activities of the Wage Board and the provisions of the determinations continued to be a factor of cohesion for the CWCMA. The members of the CWCMA voluntarily followed the lead of the Wage Board in establishing accepted minimum wage standards in the clothing industry. The close organization which they maintained as a consequence placed them in a strong position to resist the attempts of the Transvaal garment workers' union to establish an organized base among the Cape garment workers after 1934. The possibilities of the Wage Board being used as a focus for independent worker (as opposed to employer) organization do not emerge from this chapter, but will be seen in following chapters. In 1934-5, the Wage Board was a key element in the strategy of the Transvaal garment workers' union to organize Cape garment workers and to improve their conditions.

The indirect effects of the Wage Act on other industries in which industrial councils were formed in the 1920's have yet to be documented. However, these remarks of F.A.W. Lucas are suggestive:

The existence of the Wage Act has led employers in many industries in their desire to escape from its provisions, to urge their employees to form trade unions, and then to set up Industrial Councils for those industries. Often unions so brought into being are very weak. They consist largely of the better paid employees who are readily liable to negotiate agreements which protect and improve their own position while neglecting the interests of those employees who are really in need of assistance. (Lucas, 1933, p.56)

Properly considered, the focus which much recent historical writing has placed on the Industrial Conciliation Act as the premier labour law of South Africa is grossly misleading. The interaction between the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts in the 1920's and 1930's had decisive effects on the character and strategy of the union movement (as well as on that of employers' organizations). Since the 1920's growing unions which have failed to get recognition from employers have turned to the Wage Board as a substitute opponent outside the factory. The existence of the Wage Board has legitimated certain worker struggles which, had they been directed against employers immediately, would have been suppressed. In other instances initial worker organization around demands made of the Wage Board have led to employer recognition and the formation of industrial councils. In the 1930's and 1940's, the Wage Act became the central element in the organizing strategy of emergent black trade unions as well as a main weapon of the State in disorganizing and side-channelling the black union movement.<sup>204</sup>

From the discussion above and our analysis of the activities of the Wage Board in the garment and tailoring industries in Cape Town, three points emerge:

Firstly, the functions of the Wage Act in the class struggle in South Africa have changed over time.

Secondly, the effects of the Wage Act were determined in the class struggle. The effects of the Wage Act were never simply what was intended by the legislators or administrators. On occasion the unintended effects of the Act were more significant than its intended effects. This is seen, for example, in the Wage Act inspiring the organization of workers and employers under the Industrial Conciliation Act. Before the promulgation of the Wage Act, the Industrial Conciliation

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204. The importance of the Wage Act and its changing functions are reflected in, for example, Budlender (1979, pp.116-7); Davies (1979, pp.256; 265-6); Roux (1964, pp.208-9); Wickins (1978, p.99); Stein (c.1978); Hirson (1977) and The Cape Times 14 July 1930 (the Wage Board was used in an ICU campaign in Kroonstad).

Act had been little used.<sup>205</sup>

Thirdly, the effects of the Wage Act differed between areas and industries depending on the conditions of class struggle. For example, the wage determinations had very little effect on the bespoke tailoring industry in Cape Town compared with their effect on the wholesale bespoke and readymade clothing industry.

A consciousness of each of these points (for any industry and for other industrial laws as well) is essential in interpreting local struggles and ought also to reflect on an understanding of class struggle in the social formation as a whole. The above criticism of Davies, which arises from his assumption that wage determinations were generally enforced, can now be taken further. Davies examines the intentions of the Wage Act and then looks for evidence of their realisation - which he finds in the increased employment of whites. He also examines the *modus operandi* of the Wage Board and looks for likely effects of the wage determinations - a rationalisation of labour processes, more mechanization, more centralization and concentration of capital in industry. He finds evidence of all of these. Davies then concludes that the Wage Act was important in raising white employment and in promoting industry. However, the non-enforcement of wage determinations suggests that the Wage Act was not a major reason for these changes. The reason must still be tracked down - in the class struggle.

Davies' interpretation of the Wage Act is flawed because it is not adequately based in an assessment of the concrete conditions of class struggle. Davies is too concerned with showing that the Act did not adversely affect capital accumulation to concern himself with the real significance of the Act. These comments do not detract from Davies' analytical framework. The hypotheses he raises about the Wage Act remain extremely useful in relating the Act to the class struggle. Davies (and others) have presented a remarkable interpretation of how the Wage Act and other labour legislation of the Pact period arose out of class struggle. But the operation of laws, as well as their origins, requires explanation in terms of the class struggle.

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205. See p.164 above.

Table 4.2: Comparative Table of Wages of Female Machinists,  
1926 - 1936

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Quarterly Periods	Wage scale originally proposed by CWCMA - April 1926	First recommendation of the Wage Board - September 1926	Amended CWCMA proposal Oct. 1926 - gazetted as Wage Determination 2, Dec. 1926 *	Final 1927 Wage Board Recommendation - gazetted as Determination 15, June 1928	Objection by CWCMA, Jan. 1928. This had been accepted by the 'industrial council'	Wage scale proposed by CWCMA to cope with the depression between 1930 and 1932	GMU-CP proposal for an industrial council agreement 1930	Wage Board recommendation Dec. 1931 - gazetted Apr. 1932 as Determination 42	Wage Board recommendation July 1935	Industrial Council Agreement as negotiated in 1935 and gazetted in April 1936	Transvaal Industrial Council Agreement 1925 to 1932
1st 3 mths:	10/-	20/-	10/-	15/-	12/6	15/-	15/-	15/-	18/-	18/-	20/-
2nd	10/-	25/-	12/6	17/6	12/6	15/-	15/-	17/6	22/-	18/-	22/6
3rd	10/-	30/-	15/-	17/6	15/-	17/6	15/-	17/6	26/-	21/-	25/-
4th	10/-	32/6	17/6	17/6	17/6	17/6	15/-	17/6	30/-	21/-	27/6
5th	12/6	35/-	22/6	22/6	22/6	20/-	20/-	25/-	32/-	25/-	30/-
6th	12/6	35/-	22/6	27/6	22/6	20/-	20/-	25/-	34/-	25/-	32/6
7th	12/6	37/6	25/-	32/6	25/-	22/6	20/-	25/-	36/-	30/-	35/-
8th	12/6	37/6	25/-	35/-	25/-	22/6	20/-	25/-	38/-	30/-	40/-
9th	15/-	40/-	27/6	37/6	27/6	27/6	30/-	32/6	40/-	35/-	45/-
10th	15/-	40/-	27/6	37/6	27/6	27/6	30/-	32/6	42/-	35/-	45/-
11th	15/-	40/-	30/-	37/6	30/-	32/6	30/-	32/6	45/-	40/-	50/-
12th	15/-	40/-	30/-	37/6	30/-	32/6	30/-	32/6	45/-	40/-	50/-
4th year:	17/-	40/-	35/-	40/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	40/-	45/-	45/-	50/-
Qual-ified Wage:	25/-	40/-	35/-	40/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	40/-	45/-	45/-	50/-

Notes: \* Determination 2 was rendered invalid by Barone v. Rex (TPD, April 1927).

\*\* The clause discouraging piecework in Determination 42 was declared invalid in Rex v. Cohen (NPD, October 1933). Determination 42 as a whole was rendered invalid by Rex v. Ryba (TPD, December 1934).

Sources: Government Gazette 3 December 1926; 22 April 1932; 8 June 1928; 12 July 1935; 3 April 1936.

Wage Board Reports on the Clothing Industry dd. 30 November 1926; 23 February 1928.

CWCMA Minutes: 5 August 1930; 12 March 1931; 3 November 1930 - M2/1.

Garment Worker November 1936.

### INVASIONS FROM THE NORTH - A NOTE

The common subject of the next two chapters is the attempts made by the Transvaal garment workers' union to raise the wages of garment workers in the coastal areas, and especially in the Cape. Lower wages gave coastal factories a competitive advantage over Transvaal clothing manufacturers and held back the advance of wages in the Transvaal. For over thirty years, Transvaal wages remained substantially higher than those at the coast. For this whole period, the wage disparity between the inland and coastal garment factories was a major concern of the Transvaal garment workers' union.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate failure of the efforts to form a national garment workers' union or to secure a rise in coastal wage levels up to those of the Transvaal, led to Transvaal wage standards being cut drastically to conform with those of the coast in 1957. Today, garment workers in Cape Town, Durban and on the Witwatersrand, the three major centres of the industry, have comparably low wages.

The first efforts of the Transvaal union to raise the wages at the coast involved three strategies: applications to the Wage Board to recommend Transvaal wage levels for the coast; attempts to draw the registered Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula into a national union which would negotiate a national industrial council agreement; and attempts to establish a branch of the Transvaal union in Cape Town in opposition to the GWU-CP.

It was apparent from early on that to be effective, even a high wage determination would have to be accompanied by the organization of the workers. The Department of Labour was unable to enforce the wage determination itself and a strong union was needed to force employers to observe all the minimum standards.

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1. "Since 1925 the Transvaal clothing manufacturers have made the main point of their objection to higher wages and better conditions for the Transvaal workers, the lower wages of the coastal centres" - Statement of E.S. Sachs, 22 March 1949 (GWUSA Archives, Bbc 1.20.1). Appendix A, below, discusses at length the extent and nature of the wage disparity in the clothing industry.

In addition, workers' evidence would influence the Wage Board and a union could present worker demands to the Board more effectively than individuals.

With or without a progressive level of wages set by the Wage Board, a union of garment workers had to be formed in Cape Town. The GWU-CP existed from 1927 as the registered, recognised union of garment workers yet, as we have seen, it was run by non-garment workers and after 1928 ceased to have any membership to speak of.<sup>2</sup> It was non-existent from 1929 to 1934 except in its registration certificate and occasionally in the persons of its officials. But as long as the shell of the GWU-CP was inhabited by Evans and Stuart, who looked no further than a quiet industrial council, a strong garment workers' union in Cape Town would have to be a rival union to the GWU-CP. This ought not to have presented much difficulty. A rival union would recruit real members whereas the GWU-CP had not then even a paper membership. It was not a case, to begin with, of challenging an existing union or industrial council. The GWU-CP had been established by Stuart at the request of the manufacturers in 1926-7. After 1928 it ceased to hold meetings. It had never represented the garment workers and had no claim to speak for them.

The moment the Transvaal union began to organize in Cape Town in 1930 and in 1935, it experienced strong opposition. It was reasonable to expect such opposition from the employers, who were aware of the militant policy of the Transvaal union in the factories of Johannesburg and Germiston. But a key weapon used by the employers was the Cape Garment Workers' Union, which they and the CFLU revived, briefly in 1930 and 1931 and permanently in 1935. The local officials of the Department of Labour, the police and the courts also helped to defend the interests of the clothing manufacturers. As Solly Sachs, secretary of the Transvaal garment workers' union wrote:

A determined struggle was carried on between the S.A. Garment Workers' Union, a branch of the Transvaal Union ... to organize the Cape Garment Workers into a strong trade union and to bring them into one union with the Transvaal Union ... The masses of the Cape Town Garment Workers supported the Transvaal Union. The Cape Federation of Labour Unions, of

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2. See Chapter 5 below, footnote 23.

which Mr Stuart was Secretary, and the Cape Garment Workers' Union, of which Stuart, Evans and Freestone were secretaries at different times, conducted a determined campaign against the Transvaal Union and its officials and organizers ... with the help of the Department of Labour, and more particularly, the active co-operation and assistance of the Cape Clothing Manufacturers, the efforts of the Transvaal Union were ultimately defeated.<sup>3</sup>

This was followed by new efforts to draw the GWU-CP into a national union by negotiation. When this strategy failed, still more local organizing was undertaken to try to capture the GWU-CP 'from the inside'. This assault by the Transvaal union continued over a 25 year period and led to great bitterness between the unions.<sup>4</sup> The battle between the two garment workers' unions also hampered the efforts to unite the trade union movement in South Africa. None of the published histories of the Transvaal garment workers' union do justice to the intensity of the Cape organizing campaigns, to their enormous financial costs or to the importance attributed to them by the leaders of the union from 1930 to 1955. Even Sachs' own history of the union, Garment Workers in Action, barely refers to the major role played by the union in the Cape.<sup>5</sup>

The immediate intention of the narrative in Chapters 5 and 6 is to examine the contention of the Transvaal union that the GWU-CP was, to all intents and purposes, a "bosses' union", and to assess the relative roles of the Cape Union, the CFLU, the CWCMA, the Department of Labour and the police and the courts in the defeats of the first organizing efforts of the Transvaal garment

3. 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs', c.1945 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4.4).
4. In 1941 (a "Vigilance Committee" was formed inside the GWU-CP), 1943-4 (a direct Transvaal union organizing effort to absorb millinery workers in Cape Town), 1945-6 and 1954-5. See Nicol (1977).
5. The manuscript draft of Garment Workers in Action in the GWUSA Archives (Bce 2.2.2) contains a substantial but incomplete account of the Cape campaigns, 'The Struggle of the Garment Workers in the Coastal Areas'. This was not included in the book, perhaps because the GWUSA was negotiating a settlement with the Cape Union in 1955 and Sachs' straight condemnation of the GWU-CP as a bosses' union and Stuart as a bosses' lackey was, at that stage, best forgotten.

workers' union in the Cape. The wider purpose is to use the history of the two efforts - in 1930-1 and 1935-8 - to establish the South African Garment Workers' Union (SAGWU) in Cape Town to raise several matters for debate.

First, we are able to take a close look at the strategies of worker organization followed in the 1930's by the Transvaal garment workers' union, by the Communist Party of South Africa and a few nascent Trotskyist organizations. Generally all favoured working strictly to the patterns suggested by the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts. Frequent use was made of the law and the courts. As argued in Chapter 2, it is useful to develop an understanding of exactly how the industrial legislation contained the struggles of workers in registered trade unions.

Second, the story is of the failure either to deregister a rival union which is registered under the Industrial Conciliation Act or to depose its reactionary leadership. The Transvaal garment workers' union was itself the target of various take-over bids by the Afrikaner Nationalists. Several of the defenses used by the Cape Union against the Transvaal take-over bids were in turn used by the Transvaal union against the Nationalists. The difficulty of unseating the 'traditional' leadership of a registered union by using the internal 'democratic' structure remains a topical issue today. By present day standards, up until 1939 the GWU-CP was extremely vulnerable to take-over and opposition. It was not a participant in an industrial council of long standing and no industrial council-tied benefits were provided for workers.

Third, just as the unions stuck to the contours mapped out by the Industrial Council and Wage Acts, so did the clothing manufacturers. After 1934, the CWCMA recruited many new members and persuaded the industry to go into an industrial council with the GWU-CP to escape the twin threats posed by a new, higher Wage Board recommendation and the growth of a militant union in the Cape Town clothing industry.

Fourth, we are compelled to place the action in the context of class struggle in Cape Town. The campaigns provide an ideal opportunity to illustrate some of the hypotheses advanced in Chapter 2 to explain the characteristics of the class struggle in



Cape Town. In particular, they show up the role played by the Industrial Conciliation Act and the Stuart Machine in shaping the forms of class conflict in the city. No militant unionism comparable with that of the Transvaal garment workers ever took root in Cape Town. Garment workers in the two centres laboured in the same industry, under the same legal and industrial relations system and were often the target of organizing efforts by the same trade unionists, yet they could hardly have more different histories. Between 1928 and 1935 the Transvaal union participated in over one hundred strikes over wages, conditions and union recognition. In 1931 and 1932 general strikes brought the entire industry to a standstill. Despite lower-wage competition from clothing factories at the coast, Transvaal workers' wages and conditions improved after the Great Depression. In Cape Town in this period there were two strikes - at African Clothing in 1931 and at I.L. Back in 1936. Neither was supported by the GWU-CP, both were directly incited by the Transvaal-funded SAGWU. Both strikes were unmitigated failures. Cape Town wages continually lagged behind Transvaal levels.

A comparison of the effects of the Industrial Conciliation Act on the forms of worker organization in the Cape Town and Witwatersrand clothing industries shows that the Act adapted to different situations in starkly different ways. Such a comparison throws light on the important question of what conditions of class struggle in each situation determined the particular effects of the legislation. In the case of Cape Town, Chapter 2 has suggested that the backwardness of competitive capitalism combined with relatively weak worker organization and relatively strong employer organization are the crucial factors to be considered. The Stuart Machine was a condensate of all these factors and the industrial legislation of the 1920's.

The campaigns of the Transvaal garment workers' union not only revealed the power and vulnerability of the Stuart Machine, they influenced its future character by driving Stuart and his adherents into a still closer alliance with the bosses. Ironically, this led to the permanent entrenchment of the Stuart Machine in the GWU-CP while it undermined Stuart's dominance of the CFLU and the Cape labour movement - workers saw Stuart and

his friends in their true colours and rejected them where they were able to.

Fifth, the campaigns constituted a tangible link between class struggle (in the garment industry and in general) in Cape Town and on the Witwatersrand. This is seen most blatantly in the organizing activities sponsored and directed by the Transvaal garment workers' union in Cape Town itself. But it is not only a case of the Transvaal intervening in Cape Town. Conditions in Cape Town - especially wage conditions - had a significant effect in undermining or threatening to undermine wage levels in the Transvaal industry. In this less direct, but no less real manner, coastal class struggles set limits to the victories achievable by the better organized workers in the Transvaal.

The effects of coastal competition on class struggle in the Transvaal have their most extreme example in the garment industry. But other industries were also affected by a wage disparity. This more general wage differential was one of the reasons for the Transvaal union movement's concern to unite the labour movement of South Africa in one co-ordinating body. The garment workers' union's Cape campaigns took place in the context of this wider effort to organize Cape Town workers and draw Cape Town unions into, first, the South African Trades Union Congress (SATUC) and then the South African Trades and Labour Council (TLC).

The TLC was formed in 1930 with a constitution specially tailored to meet the Cape's demand that any co-ordinating body should be non-racial. Transvaal unions continued to be racially exclusive, or divided into racially-determined branches but the TLC allowed all unions to apply for affiliation - black, white or mixed - registered or unregistered. Although the Cape Federation participated in drawing up the TLC constitution, it refused to join the new body. Soon, the TLC went on the offensive in Cape Town. In 1931 it set up a Cape Districts Committee (CDC), made up of local branches of several national unions affiliated to the TLC as well as a few unions which were independent of the CFLU. This was to be a base for a truly national organization of unions that included Cape Town unions. The CDC did not achieve any notable success until after 1935 when, combined with a growing

'left opposition' inside the CFLU, its activities forced Stuart to start negotiations with the TLC on unity. The organizing crusade amongst the garment workers became a major focus of the CDC campaign.

The different forms of organization/disorganization in the Cape Town and Witwatersrand clothing industries reflect on the wage disparity in the industry. The wage disparity was the basic reason for the campaigns. But it cannot be accepted simply as 'a fact of life'. It was the product of complex struggles in the garment industry over a thirty year period. The success or failure of the campaigns were important in determining both the dimensions of the wage disparity and the absolute level of wages in Cape Town and on the Witwatersrand. In 1931, the failure to force a rise in Cape wages partly accounted for a ten per cent cut in Transvaal wages in the following year. In 1935 and 1936, Transvaal-sponsored organization in Cape Town assisted to raise the wages of Cape garment workers. This, in turn, allowed wages in the Transvaal to be increased.

In general, none of the efforts of the TLC and the Transvaal garment workers' union, of the Communist Party or of the numerous leftist splinter groups in Cape Town in the 1930's had much success in mobilizing the broad mass of workers in the city. The economic organizations of the working class in Cape Town, despite the absence of a legal 'colour bar', never included the mass of less-skilled workers. The trade unions did not provide a nucleus for working class political organization which, such as it was, appears to have been dominated by the petty-bourgeoisie. The reactionary Cape Garment Workers' Union was not merely the product of the treachery of "scabs and traitors" - it was the issue of class struggle in Cape Town.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE FIRST CAPE CAMPAIGN 1930-1931

The wage disparity between Cape Town and the Witwatersrand cannot alone explain the forays of the Transvaal union into the Cape. The undertaking of the campaigns required two additional elements - an unwillingness on the part of the Cape labour movement to challenge manufacturers on the wage difference<sup>1</sup> and a Transvaal union able and willing to spend a great deal of time and money to organize workers a thousand miles from its home base.

No South African trade union has a history more deserving of study than the Transvaal garment workers' union.<sup>2</sup> As the first successful non-craft union in manufacturing industry, as the organizer of women workers, as an originator of parallel unionism and as a bitter contender against Afrikaner Nationalism, its history expresses all the hopes of a strong and united workers movement. It also reveals the impossibility of sustaining such a movement while retaining racial divisions in organization.

Workers in the clothing factories in Johannesburg and Germiston were organized by the Witwatersrand Tailors' Association (WTA) in \_\_\_\_\_

1. There were significant wage differentials between the Cape and Transvaal in several industries - garments, leather, sweets and furniture, for example. The wage differences lead to the collapse of the National Industrial Council for the Furniture Industry (Cape Times 21 February 1930).
2. The standard history of the union (now called the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa) is Sachs (1957). Since 1977, several new studies have made use of the considerable archive of the union at the University of the Witwatersrand. See Touyz (1979); Lewis, J. (1976 and 1978); Berger (1982); Nicol (1977). The widely-read article by O'Meara (1978) is severely criticised in Touyz (1979 and 1982). Most of these studies concentrate on the battle between the union and Afrikaner Nationalism which was fought out before 1960. None deals with the decline of the union since this date nor with the history of parallel unionism in the clothing industry. Also useful is Du Plessis (1955).

the early 1920's. This union of male tailoring workers was founded in 1913. The WTA was concerned that the factories would undercut their business by employing more cheap female labour. They set up a 'factory section' in their union for these workers and, in 1925, established an industrial council with the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association (TCMA). The first industrial council agreement was gazetted shortly afterwards.

In 1928, E.S. Sachs became the general secretary of the WTA.<sup>3</sup> The wages in the industrial council agreement were relatively favourable to workers but they were not widely respected by the employers and conditions for workers were very bad.<sup>4</sup> The union was weakly organized and was unable to insist that employers observed the agreement. Although the majority of factory workers were Afrikaans-speaking women, no Afrikaner women were members of the central committee of the union and there were no women organizers. The union was dominated by the, largely Jewish, higher-paid, male tailors. Most women workers were ignorant of the purposes of a trade union and those who belonged to the union were members simply by virtue of a clause in the industrial council agreement that TCMA members could only employ trade union labour.<sup>5</sup>

Sachs slowly began to organize the Afrikaner women to play an active part in the union. Despite opposition from the central committee, he began an aggressive campaign to force employees to observe the wage agreement. Where he could, Sachs made full use of the law and was instrumental in bringing many prosecutions against underpaying employers. The union also resorted to strike action on many occasions. This often proved most effective. All of the women factory workers were white and the majority were young, poor Afrikaners who had recently migrated to town from the

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3. The WTA changed its name to the "Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal)" in 1931.

4. Sachs, E.S. 'The Split in the Garment Workers' Union (Tvl.) 1934' (GWUSA Archives, Bbc 1.136); Sachs (1956, pp.36-42).

5. Clause 20 in the agreement gazetted on 17 August 1928 (Government Notice No. 1408). The initial agreement of 1925 contained the same 'closed shop agreement' between the TCMA and the WTA (Government Gazette 11 September 1925, GN 1514).

rural areas. The great achievement of Sachs and the young Afrikaner women who were his lieutenants was to mould these workers into a strong and militant trade union. This union, over the years, won impressive wage rises and defended itself against the divisive intentions of the Afrikaner Nationalists. The garment workers' union stood firmly on the left of the trade union movement. It was active in (white and Labour Party) politics and gave material support to many strikes and organizing efforts outside the garment industry.

From 1928, the union became identified with the name and personality of Solly Sachs. Sachs was born in Lithuania in 1899 and came to South Africa as a boy with his family. His youth was spent in considerable poverty but he educated himself and was admitted to the University of the Witwatersrand in the mid-1920's. Financial difficulties compelled him to leave university and he found employment as a trade union secretary. He was an active member of the Communist Party until his expulsion in 1931. He remained a committed supporter of communism (and a special admirer of Joseph Stalin) until his death in London in 1976. Sachs was loathed by the Afrikaner Nationalists, to whom he was the embodiment of evil. He was a constant victim of state harassment from 1932 onward. His extreme arrogance and political opportunism earned him many enemies on both the left and right of the labour movement. But he was the key element in the success of the garment workers' union. He was secretary of the union for 25 years until the Nationalist government removed him from office in 1953 under the Suppression of Communism Act.

In 1930, the success of the garment workers' union lay in the future. Although Sachs' efforts to enforce the agreement did make headway, conditions in the industry remained very unsatisfactory. The clothing industry on the Witwatersrand was extremely competitive. Profitability - often viability - was further threatened by competition from the Cape and from overseas where the wages of clothing workers were even lower than in the Transvaal. The struggling clothing manufacturers could often not afford to pay the minimum wage - let alone consider a rise in the wage scale.

# 1. Organize or Starve!

By 1930 our union realised that unless the workers of the coastal areas were organised, their conditions would remain deplorable, and our conditions would ultimately sink to theirs.

- Solly Sachs<sup>6</sup>

Solly Sachs visited Cape Town early in 1930.<sup>7</sup> He wanted the Cape garment workers to be properly organized and their union drawn into a national garment workers' union which could negotiate suitable wages for the whole country.<sup>8</sup> Sachs called at the CFLU offices and spoke to Stuart, who referred him to Evans. This was not the first approach made to the CFLU on the subject of a national organization of clothing workers. Early in 1928, the WTA held a conference to discuss the matter which Stuart and A.Z. Berman attended.<sup>9</sup> Nothing came of this. Nothing came of Sachs' new approach either. Sachs was not a diplomat. He did not approach Stuart and Evans to request brotherly assistance from the Cape labour movement and the GWU-CP to solve the problems created by the wage disparity. He made it plain that it was his intention to organize the Cape garment workers whatever the attitude of the leaders of the CFLU. Before his arrival he had made statements to the press criticising the low wages and poor

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6. 'Statement of E.S. Sachs', 22 March 1949 (GWUSA Archives, Bcc 1.20.1).

7. Sachs was part of a joint TCMA/MTA deputation to the Minister of Finance to press for a higher tariff on clothing. The deputation was expanded in Cape Town to include the CWCMA (CWCMA Minutes: 10 February 1930 - special meeting with representatives of the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Transvaal)).

8. Sachs, E.S. 'The Struggle of the Garment Workers in the Coastal Areas' (GWUSA Archives Bce 2.2.2).

9. CFLU Minutes: 20 January 1928 (TUCSA Archives).

organization of workers in Cape Town.<sup>10</sup> He had declared his intention of forming a national industrial council for the clothing industry.<sup>11</sup> Stuart and Evans correctly regarded Sachs' request for co-operation as an ultimatum - either they submitted to Transvaal leadership voluntarily or Sachs would organize the Cape garment workers himself.

Stuart lost no time in arranging a meeting with the CWCMA. He explained that "the Trade Union in the North" was striving to form a national union with the ultimate object of raising Cape wages up to Transvaal levels. The operation of the Transvaal industrial council agreement over a national area "would be detrimental to the Cape manufacturers' interests"<sup>12</sup>. If the manufacturers did not want a national industrial council to be,

...forced on them, Mr Stuart said that they would have to assist by strengthening the trade union in the Cape by getting their employees to become members, and to still further insure against the contingency of a National Agreement and domination by the Transvaal, he suggested that the Cape clothing industry form its own industrial council and manage its own affairs.<sup>13</sup>

The manufacturers readily agreed to encourage their workers to become members of the Union. Laite suggested that they post notices in the factories stating that employers,

...had no objection to their employees being members of the Trade Union, and that it would be advantageous for them to join.<sup>14</sup>

The CWCMA also agreed to give "serious consideration" to the formation of an industrial council.

Sachs meanwhile decided to ignore the CFLU and establish direct contact with the workers. He wanted to assess the chances

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10. Cape Times 16 December 1929; 20 December 1929.

11. Cape Times 6 January 1930.

12. CWCMA Minutes: 13 January 1930 - M2/1

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.



of organizing the garment workers independently of the CFLU and the GWU-CP. His main local contact was John Gomas, a tailor and political activist who had corresponded with the Transvaal garment workers union since at least 1927.<sup>15</sup> Gomas was a devoted member of the Communist Party (CP). He had been an important figure in the ICU, holding the post of Provincial Secretary of the Western Cape when the communists were expelled from the ICU in 1926 (Wickins, 1978, pp.85,107,109). He then played a leading role in the revival of the ANC in Cape Town (Roux, 1964, p.204).

Sachs and Gomas called a public meeting of garment and tailoring workers in Cape Town in February 1930.<sup>16</sup> About sixty workers attended. Sachs later wrote:

They all told us of the terrible conditions under which they were compelled to work; that the Cape Garment Workers' Union was a bosses' union, in which the workers had no confidence at all. They expressed great admiration for our Union, and begged us to send people to organize the garment workers of the Cape.<sup>17</sup>

The Transvaal union opened an office in Cape Town to organize garment workers into a new body called the South African Garment Workers' Union (SAGWU). John Gomas was appointed part-time secretary at a salary of £10 a month.<sup>18</sup> The SAGWU made little progress. Worker subscription income declined steadily from 16 shillings in March to 6/6 by May.<sup>19</sup> But from June the SAGWU showed new signs of life. Once Bennie Weinbren was employed to take over as secretary, membership began to rise.

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15. Letter from Gomas to C.F. Glass (general secretary of the WTA), 31 May 1927 (GWUSA Archives).

16. Pamphlet issued for 16 February 1930 (GWUSA Archives).

17. 'The Struggle of the Garment Workers...' op. cit., p.11/156.

18. Ibid; SAGWU Financial Statements, March-August 1930 (GWUSA Archives).

19. Ibid. Gomas was very likely diverted by the efforts of Thaele to expel him and other communists from the ANC. These reached a climax in 1930 (Roux, 1964, pp.236-43).

Weinbren had been chairman of the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions on the Witwatersrand and an organizer of several successful African unions which the CP had built up as the ICU declined (Roux, 1944, p.83; Simons & Simons, 1969, pp.377,424). Weinbren was a believer in "a revolutionary and militant policy".<sup>20</sup> He was a firm advocate of the strike weapon. At a trade union conference in Cape Town in 1930<sup>21</sup> he seconded a motion that the clauses of the Industrial Conciliation Act which prohibited strikes should be abolished. The minutes recorded:

Mr Weinbren agreed with the motion but demanded the entire repeal of the Act. It arose out of the 1922 strike on the Witwatersrand. The Industrial Councils only functioned when unions are well organized. In any case the class struggle continued and there could be no conciliation between employers and employees.<sup>22</sup>

Weinbren's brief was to organize a strong union which would allow an application to be made for the skeleton GWU-CP to be deregistered and the SAGWU registered in its stead. On the face of it, this was a simple task. It did not involve drawing members away from the GWU-CP, as that union existed only on paper.<sup>23</sup> It held no meetings, it had no representative on the CFLU executive<sup>24</sup>, it organized no workers, it turned a blind eye

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20. Trades & Labour Journal of South Africa, December 1931.

21. This was the founding conference of the SA Trades and Labour Council. Weinbren (and John Gomas) represented the Transvaal garment workers' union.

22. All-In Trades Union Conference: Report of Proceedings, 4-6 October 1930 (Ballinger Papers, Jagger Library, UCT - BC347 A10.II).

23. This is beyond question. See, for example 'Statement of E.S. Sachs', op. cit.; 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs, op. cit., 'The Struggle of the Garment Workers in the Coastal Area', op. cit.; 'Statement of David Lunn', paragraphs 3,7,16 (GWUSA Archives Cba 2.4.4); Garment Workers Union Commission of Enquiry Minutes of Evidence: Evidence of Rose Crawford, p.120 (GWUSA Archives, Bca 4).

24. See the CFLU Minutes 1929-1931 (TUCSA Archives).

to the "abominable" wages and conditions in the clothing factories<sup>25</sup>. But Weinbren found organizing to be slow, hard work. However disgruntled, workers were scared of confronting their employers. Weinbren wrote to Sachs:

I am getting a number of complaints of underpayment, but unfortunately, some of them are afraid to make publicity of same in case of the sack. I use as much propaganda with these workers to try and induce them to allow me to proceed with these grievances, but like taking out teeth, they'll wait another little while etc.<sup>26</sup>

The employers, forewarned by Stuart, discouraged their workers from joining the SAGWU. Although Sachs later alleged that some workers were dismissed for their membership of the SAGWU<sup>27</sup>, there is no strong indication that employers had to go so far. The mere expression of their wish that workers should not join the SAGWU was sufficient. The manager of The African Clothing Factory told a group of workers that,

He did not object to them being members of a respectable union...but he objected to workers associating with these Johannesburg hotheads, who were out to turn their heads and undermine the conditions of the factories and get all the trade to Johannesburg.<sup>28</sup>

The CFLU stressed this last point to question the motives behind the formation of the SAGWU. Weinbren reported that at a CFLU meeting,

...we were attacked because we are anti-coloured and are out to get rid of all the Coloureds and give all jobs to the whites.<sup>29</sup>

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25. Sachs, quoted in Cape Times 28 February 1930.

26. Letter from Weinbren to Sachs, 7 August 1930 (GWUSA Archives Cba 2.4.1).

27. 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs' op. cit., paragraph 13.

28. Letter from Weinbren to Sachs, 24 July 1930 (GWUSA Archives).

29. Ibid.

The same allegation was made by a speaker from the floor at a local ANC rally.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the caution of the workers and opposition from both the clothing bosses and the Cape Town labour movement, Weinbren remained optimistic. He wrote in early August:

The Union is gradually becoming more militant and before long I hope to make it an organization with a fighting policy.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of the month the SAGWU had one hundred paying members<sup>32</sup> and Weinbren wrote to the CWCMA to ask for a meeting to discuss the formation of an Industrial Council. The employers refused.<sup>33</sup> Weinbren then wrote to the Wage Board to request a new investigation of the Cape clothing industry. He stated that the workers had not been sufficiently represented at the previous Wage Board sitting and that the SAGWU was,

...the only organization in the Cape that can claim to be the representative Union of the bespoke section as well as the manufacturing section.<sup>34</sup>

Although this was a hollow claim, given that over two thousand workers were employed in the industry and the SAGWU never claimed a membership of more than 120, the rival union probably had more members than the registered union and was the only active organizing body.

In late 1930, Evans approached the CWCMA to suggest the establishment of an industrial council.<sup>35</sup> The SAGWU presence in Cape Town was not even mentioned in the minutes of the first meeting. The concern of the manufacturers was whether an

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30. Ibid.

31. Letter from Weinbren to Sachs, 7 August 1930 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4.1).

32. Letter from Weinbren to Sachs, 20 August 1930 (GWUSA Archives).

33. Letter from Weinbren to CWCMA, 27 August 1930; letter from Laite to Weinbren, 30 August 1930 (GWUSA Archives).

34. Letters from Weinbren to the Wage Board and to the Minister of Labour, 11 September 1930 (GWUSA Archives).

35. See Chapter 4.

industrial council agreement would allow them to reduce wages. The SAGWU became an issue only once the Department of Labour revealed that it was to investigate the "representativeness" of the GWU-CP as the SAGWU had applied for registration.<sup>36</sup> Laite explained to the manufacturers that,

...unless the Dept. could be satisfied that their Union adequately represented the employees in the industry, it would be de-registered in favour of the registration of the other organization which had been fostered by the Transvaal. If this eventuated it would probably result in the formation of a National organization of employees, to be followed by the formation of a National Industrial Council...<sup>37</sup>

Laite stated that this interference would be prevented if the Cape manufacturers formed an industrial council of their own. The minutes recorded:

It was the opinion of the members that it would be in their best interest to form a local Industrial Council and, if necessary, by means of a stop order system...to assist the Trade Union to become representative of the workers in the Industry.<sup>38</sup>

When the Divisional Inspector of Labour investigated the representivity of the two Unions ten days later he reported that,

Both in a way are functioning, so far as holding meetings go...The Manufacturers have given Mr. Evans a definite promise...that they will do all in their power to assist in the organization of the employees, in the way of distribution of notices of meetings or stop orders on wages for Union

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36. CWCMA Minutes: 30 September 1930 - M2/1.

37. CWCMA Minutes: 30 September 1930 - M2/1.

38. Ibid. The manufacturers, as in the past, abandoned the idea of forming an industrial council once the Minister again made it clear that he would not approve of an agreement with lower wages than in the current wage determination (Letter from Ivan Walker of the Department of Labour to CWCMA, 29 October 1930 S.A.B. ARB 1058/27).

subscriptions.<sup>39</sup>

In consequence of such assistance the GWU-CP had a paying membership approaching 200. Weinbren's books indicated 109 members. The Divisional Inspector was unsuccessful in arranging a meeting between Weinbren and Evans to resolve the dispute.<sup>40</sup>

In February 1931, the SAGWU sent a deputation to the Department of Labour in Pretoria to demand the de-registration of the GWU-CP as it "had become defunct" and was in no way representative of the garment workers.<sup>41</sup> The Secretary for Labour refused to do this as he understood that,

...the Cape Garment Workers' Union is endeavouring to increase its effective membership by means of a propaganda campaign.<sup>42</sup>

After a year of operation, SAGWU had 112 members and had failed to secure the de-registration of the GWU-CP. Weinbren returned to Johannesburg to be secretary of the Reef (Native Trade) Assistants Union,<sup>43</sup> leaving the organization in the care of John Gomas.

As the depression deepened, the chances of carrying through the organization of a rival union of garment workers diminished. Gomas reported to Sachs that many workers were on short time or unemployed and the manufacturers had not the least regard for the wage determination. He thought that if the GWU-CP were to continue their organizing effort,

It seems to me there can be little difficulties in their way in gaining a certain amount of success. They have the

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39. Letter from Playfair to the Secretary for Labour, 10 October 1930. S.A.B. ARB 1058/27.

40. Ibid.

41. Letter from the SAGWU to the Secretary for Labour, 9 February 1931 S.A.B. ARB 1054/306; letter from Secretary for Labour to Sachs (Transvaal Garment Workers Union), 29 May 1931 (GWUSA Archives, Bbe 1.1.1).

42. Letter to Sachs, 29 May 1931 op. cit.

43. Trades & Labour Journal of South Africa, December 1931.

manpower, finance and halls of the Federation behind them. This on the other hand has been the entire drawback with us.<sup>44</sup>

## 2. Organize and Starve

"The workers are determined to win and only starvation can drive them back defeated."

- SAGWU circular, 29 August 1931.

The SAGWU should have died quietly and unmourned in mid-1931. But the decline of the SAGWU coincided with new crises within the garment industry, the Communist Party and the South African labour movement. The unfortunate garment workers of the African Clothing Factory were pushed into a suicidal strike in which these crises all found expression. The SAGWU died not with a whimper but a bang.

The crisis in the garment industry had two sources - the wage disparity between the Cape and Transvaal and the depression. In 1931, for the first time, the bulk of government clothing contracts were awarded in Cape Town.<sup>45</sup> The Transvaal union was extremely concerned about this as the TCMA had attributed this loss of business to the lower coastal wages and had refused to renew or improve the industrial council agreement. The Transvaal union had to go through the motions of calling a general strike before it was decided to extend the old agreement until October 1931. This merely served to postpone the battle but any success achieved in the Cape campaign in the interim would strengthen the union's hand. Sachs promised Gomas continued and increased financial support and urged him to renew his efforts to organize the Cape workers.<sup>46</sup>

In July 1931 the Divisional Inspector of Labour reported that work was "practically at a standstill" in the clothing factories apart from work on a few government contracts. At African

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44. Letter from Gomas to Sachs, 24 June 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

45. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931 op. cit., paragraph 6.

46. See letter from Gomas to Sachs, 15 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

Clothing, for example, sixty workers had already been retrenched and sixty more were under notice.

The factory is particularly quiet and it is plain to see that the Proprietor is worried and irritated to such an extent that he will scarcely see Inspectors. The position here is further complicated by the fact that many of the Coloured workers who have been sacked or are under notice have offered to work at any wages.<sup>47</sup>

Workers at African Clothing, the largest factory in Cape Town, were informed of a third wave of retrenchments in mid-August. The leaders of the SAGWU used this opportunity to call a strike. It was the worst possible moment for workers to confront the management. Even if all the workers had supported the strike, its success would have been doubtful. The factory was decreasing output as markets contracted and it was unable to meet foreign competition and still make a profit.<sup>48</sup> The management stated that,

...the strike could not have taken place at a more convenient time in so far as they were personally concerned.<sup>49</sup>

But the SAGWU did not succeed in convincing even a third of the workforce to join the strike. The SAGWU was not properly organized in the factory. Few of the workers were even members of the union. A unionist later commented,

...there can be no doubt that at the beginning of this struggle there was not a semblance of organization.<sup>50</sup>

The strike was lost before it began.

To understand why Gomas promoted the strike we need to look

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47. Letter from R. Beattie to the Secretary for Labour, 4 July 1931 S.A.B. ARB 1069/22.

48. Cape Times 20 August 1931.

49. Letter from A.G. Forsyth, chairman of CDC of the TLC to W.H. Andrews, secretary of the TLC, 25 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

50. Letter from Forsyth to Andrews, 3 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).



beyond Sachs' eagerness for results and the effects of the depression to the crises which dismembered the Communist Party of South Africa after 1930.

By 1930, the CP had recovered from the setback it suffered on the expulsion of its members from key positions in the ICU. It had built up a membership, the majority being black, approaching 3 000 (Roux, 1944, p.104) and had organized successful African trade unions on the Witwatersrand which embraced over 10 000 workers (Roux, 1944, p.83). In 1929 the Party ran a campaign in the Transkei where S.P. Bunting stood for election to Parliament as a native representative. Bunting lost the election but, as a propaganda exercise, the campaign was a great success (Roux, 1964, p.217). The following year, the CP set up a League of African Rights which was to be a mass organization to fight for the abolition of pass laws, the extension of the franchise and free education. It was enthusiastically supported by a wide range of opposition groups. The CP was successfully tuning its actions to the class struggle in South Africa and was growing stronger and more influential despite intense police repression.

But by 1933 the Party was reduced to a membership of 150 after engaging in an orgy of self-destruction which made it impotent for a decade.

The destruction of the CP had its origins in the role played by the 3rd Communist International. The Comintern was conceived by Lenin and Trotsky as a world Party which would lead the world revolution they confidently expected after the First World War. When this revolution failed to emerge and the Soviet Union came under attack from the capitalist countries, the Comintern degenerated into an arm of the Soviet government. Foreign communist parties were manipulated to serve the selfish interests of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>51</sup> As serious was the effect the Comintern had on inculcating within communist parties a blind adherence to and reliance on the policies of the Soviet Party. Loyalty to the party line, however irrational, however swiftly veering between opposites, became the most essential attribute of a party member. In

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51. See Claudin (1975); Trotsky (1974); Carr (1982).

the Soviet Union dissidents were shot or exiled, in other countries they were merely expelled from the Party.

The Comintern had first left the tiny South African party to its own devices and allowed it to work out its own ways of giving effect to the resolutions of the congresses of the International. But as the organizational apparatus of the Comintern grew and as the fomenting of revolution in the colonies became an aim of Soviet foreign policy, it began to establish a tight control on the South African party (Roux, 1944, pp.86,87; Claudin, 1975, pp.270-1). This was first seen in the imposition of the Black Republic policy on the CPSA in spite of it being opposed by the majority of the Party. It continued with an instruction coming from Moscow to disband the League of African Rights as it put forward reformist demands and then with the installation of Douglas Wolton as the general secretary, and effective dictator over the Party in September 1930. Through Wolton, his wife Molly and Lazar Bach, the CPSA began to mimic the attitudes and actions of the Soviet Party and, in chorus with other parties, mechanically repeat the "guiding slogans" of the "world revolution".

The harm wrought by these practices in South Africa was small when compared with the dire effects they produced elsewhere, most notoriously in China and Germany. In China, Stalin's insistence that the Chinese Party should remain allied to the Kuomintang led to its decimation in a massacre planned by Chiang Kai-Shek (Deutscher, 1966, p.396; Claudin, 1975, pp.271-4). In Germany, the insistence that the KPD should attack the social democrats as 'social fascists' paved the way for the Nazi victory and the destruction of the most advanced working class in Europe (Claudin, 1975, p.152 et seq.). In South Africa the policies of the Comintern merely put an end to the influence the Party was beginning to have over the mass of black workers and peasants<sup>52</sup> and rooted within it a Stalinism which endures to this day.

In late 1931, the SACP was in the process of following

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52. Roux (1944, p.88). Roux notes that the storm in the Party "destroyed the influence of the CP over the Bantu masses more effectively than even the police of the South African Government could have done".

Stalin's latest move to the 'left'.<sup>53</sup> The emphasis of the Party was on two points - crushing the "Right Danger" and on mounting "revolutionary" campaigns to heighten the class struggle. The right danger was represented by social democrats and reformists. No alliances were to be considered between the Party and social democratic organizations. Party members who betrayed social democratic tendencies were ruthlessly expelled (as were any who dared question 'Party' decisions<sup>54</sup>). The CP had been a prime target of the 'reign of terror' launched by Pirow against all radical opposition after 1929. Hirson (1982) suggests that this was a time to retreat and protect the Party and its membership, but instead, "the leaders urged new struggle and still spoke of the coming revolution" (p.18). The main organizational resolution at the 1930 Party conference stated:

It is the task of the party to take the initiative in preparing strikes and to win the independent leadership of all economic struggles and to convert the local partial struggles increasingly taking place, into wide class battles developing into mass political struggles.<sup>55</sup>

In mid-1931, Wolton 'revived' the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions which had declined rapidly after the departure of Weinbren and the expulsion of T.W. Thibedi in 1930. The organization was renamed the African Federation of Trade Unions (AFTU) and stood for,

...a revolutionary class struggle, uniting all workers, black and white, against the Government, Employers and Trade Union Bureaucrats who now form a united trinity against the workers.<sup>56</sup>

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53. See Roux (1944, p.123 et seq.), Roux (1964, p.255 et seq.).

54. Most 'Party' decisions were taken by Wolton, who also controlled the Party newspaper Umsebenzi. Much of Umsebenzi reads like anti-communist satire. On page 2, column 2 of the 25 February 1933 edition we read of the expulsion of Gana Makabeni. The expulsion notice is signed by one Comrade Mafisa who is himself expelled in a notice tucked away in column 1.

55. Quoted in Hirson (1982, p.18).

56. Umsebenzi 4 September 1931.

The AFTU broke new ground in strongly opposing the participation of unions in "class collaboration legislation". Up to this point (and afterwards) the use of legal machinery to improve wages and organize unions was an accepted strategy of the CP. But from the end of 1931 any communist in trade unions who did not renounce the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts was expelled. Few trade unionists were left in the Party by 1934. The AFTU does not seem ever to have organized unions itself. It confined its role to forming "revolutionary opposition groups in the existing reformist unions"<sup>57</sup>.

The AFTU launched itself upon the scene just as the SAGWU was to begin with its new organizing effort.<sup>58</sup> On account of the close links of Gomas (and Sachs<sup>59</sup>) with the CP, SAGWU became allied with the aims of the AFTU. The unsuspecting workers of African Clothing were to be the first to experience the effects of a "militant Red Trade Union based upon a sharp class struggle policy"<sup>60</sup>. Even before the strike began, "orthodox labour circles" in Cape Town condemned the promotion of a strike as "the effort of Communists acting on instructions to infiltrate trade unions". It was being fostered,

...because of the general communist principle that all strikes are desirable because they rouse the fighting spirit of the workers and promote aggressive class hostility.<sup>61</sup>

Gomas did not engineer the strike alone. He was assisted by a group of militant garment workers and James La Guma, the chair

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57. Umsebenzi 4 March 1932. See Simons & Simons (1969, p.444) In the Transvaal garment workers' union the AFTU organized a "mass trial of disloyal garment workers" in 1933. Sachs first welcomed the AFTU as "an organization to ginger up the membership" (Umsebenzi 24 July 1931). See Touyz (1979, pp.61-2 and 65-68) and Sachs, E.S. 'The Split in the Garment Workers' Union (Tvl) 1934 op. cit. on the activities of the AFTU in the Transvaal union.

58. Umsebenzi 10 July 1931.

59. Sachs supported the formation and intentions of the AFTU in Umsebenzi 24 July 1931.

60. Umsebenzi 21 August 1931.

61. Cape Times 20 August 1931.

man of SAGWU.<sup>62</sup> Also, the strike was fired by many grievances beyond the intended dismissals. Workers were seething with frustration at past dismissals, wage cuts, short time, underpayment of wages due, swearing by foremen and the continual dismissal of qualified workers and their replacement by juveniles. The wage determination provided minimum wages for "learners" and qualified workers. For example, the wage of a female learner with no previous experience in the industry was fifteen shillings a week. This minimum was increased by small amounts periodically until, after three years of employment, workers were entitled to a minimum wage of forty shillings a week.<sup>63</sup> As most tasks could be mastered in a matter of months, employers tended to fire workers as they became entitled, through length of service, to higher wages and to replace them with low-paid beginners. Thus a CWCMA meeting was told that the new batch of dismissals at African Clothing were necessary not because the factory was reducing its staff, but because the workers concerned,

...were unable to earn the minimum wage fixed under the Wage Board Determination.<sup>64</sup>

Simon Roytowski, the owner of the factory, had told the workers that if they obtained exemption from the increments they could be kept on, "but otherwise they would have to be put off"<sup>65</sup>. This was a common strategy by which clothing manufacturers adapted to the wage determination. It was not prohibited in the determination and was merely intensified by the depression. As long as garment workers were unorganized this practice could not be checked. As Gomas wrote,

...the alternative is to organize strongly and to resist the systematical attack on their conditions and to follow the

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62. La Guma had recently been readmitted to the CP after expulsion in 1929. Before then he had been general secretary of the ICU (until 1926) and secretary of FNETU. He had been a leading supporter of the Black Republic policy and had twice been to Moscow.

63. Wage Determination No. 15.

64. CWCMA Minutes: 1 September 1931 - M2/1.

65. Cape Times 21 August 1931.

lead of the Johsburg workers.<sup>66</sup>

But the encouragement of a strike in an unorganized factory in the depths of a depression was sheer adventurism.

The morning after the planned retrenchments were announced, the SAGWU, said Gomas,

...issued immediately an inciting leaflet calling the workers to a meeting and urging them to strike.<sup>67</sup>

The meeting was poorly attended but those present, "the most qualified and experienced workers" joined the union and agreed to persuade other workers to "join up and prepare for a strike."<sup>68</sup> Gomas wrote to Sachs that,

We have emphasised to the workers that strong financial assistance can be expected from the Joburg workers in the event they decide to strike.<sup>69</sup>

Through the next week the SAGWU held lunch-time meetings near the factory and an evening meeting at a "packed" Fidelity Hall. More workers signed up.<sup>70</sup> The controversy over the retrenchments was well aired in the press. The Cape Times described the agitation around the retrenchments as a "Communist intrigue"<sup>71</sup>, but printed in full all the demands, pamphlets and resolutions of the SAGWU. When the SAGWU stated that it had wide worker backing for the threat to strike, the African Clothing Factory responded by showing the press a declaration, signed by 367 workers,

...repudiating their association with the SA Garment Workers' Union and denying that any attended the SA Garment Workers' Union meeting at which the resolution (to strike) was passed.<sup>72</sup>

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66. Letter from Gomas to Sachs, recounting the SAGWU's message to workers at the start of the campaign, 15 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

67. Ibid. (The leaflet was quoted in full in a Cape Times report of 20 August 1930, see below).

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Letter from Gomas to Sachs, 19 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

71. 20 August 1931; 22 August 1931.

72. Cape Times 22 August 1931.

The declaration, taken round for signature by the foreman, stated that workers were not dissatisfied with their employment. This incident demonstrates the lack of worker solidarity in the factory, quite apart from the lack of organization.

Despite all the portents of disaster, the leaders of the SAGWU and their supporters were determined to call a strike. A pamphlet read, in part:

Because you are the most unorganized...your wages are the lowest... The garment workers of Johannesburg, they are organized! They struggle! They strike! Against sweating! Against wage cuts! Against short time and unemployment! They are more successful.

Cape Town factory and bespoke tailors, do the same!...

Wake up! Organize! Strike!<sup>73</sup>

The strike began on Monday 24 August 1931.

Gomas had told Sachs that the SAGWU had no money, no meeting place and no experienced organizers.<sup>74</sup> The Transvaal union immediately sent off money and two organizers to Cape Town, but it was several days before they arrived. Roytowski refused to speak to Gomas or La Guma, the leaders of SAGWU. In this situation there was a role for A.G. Forsyth and the brand new Cape Districts Committee of the Trades and Labour Council. Through the involvement of Forsyth, the strike at African Clothing was vested with an additional significance as a site of struggle between the trade union movement of the north and that of the south.

Since the formation of the South African Industrial Federation in 1911, there had been numerous attempts to unite all unions under a single co-ordinating body. The Cape (where the CFLU held sway) constantly found excuses to avoid joining a

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73. Cape Times 20 August 1931.

74. Letter from Gomas to Sachs, 18 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

national body.<sup>75</sup> The major stumbling blocks to unity were the racial attitude of many Transvaal unions, who refused to allow blacks to attend union conferences, and the wish of the CFLU to retain its autonomy. In 1930, the differences between the north and south seemed close to resolution. The CFLU was an active participant at an 'all-in' conference in Cape Town which drew up the constitution for the S.A. Trades & Labour Council.<sup>76</sup> This placed no racial restrictions on affiliation to the TLC. It was agreed that the Transvaal-based SATUC and the CFLU would each dissolve and recommend that their affiliates join the new body. The SATUC dissolved at the end of 1930 and transferred all its funds to the TLC, but the CFLU did not follow suit. A member of the CFLU executive, A.Z. Berman, attacked the TLC as being a plot to secure labour backing for Cresswell in his fight in the SA Labour Party. There was no truth in the allegation, but the Federation delayed in repudiating Berman's insulting remarks and the tenuous unity in the trade union movement was broken. Stuart continued to pay lip service to national unity but he refused to countenance the dissolution of the Federation. He wanted absolute autonomy for the Federation in any national body but refused to agree to the Federation becoming an autonomous local committee of the TLC (Williams 1974).

The TLC decided little was to be gained by continuing negotiations to absorb the Federation. In August 1931 they founded a local committee in Cape Town which was independent of the Federation. Bill Andrews, the TLC secretary, visited Cape Town to launch the Cape Districts Committee (CDC) with a membership of

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75. The only account of the North-South conflicts in the trade union movement is Williams (1974). He errs in seeing an end to this conflict after Stuart resigned from the CFLU in 1941. Stuart formed a new body and the conflict continued until the formation of TUCSA in 1955. In all other respects, however, it is a most excellent and useful article.

76. 38 Unions participated in the conference.



about ten unions or branches of national unions.<sup>77</sup> Andrews attended the meeting at which the SAGWU announced its new campaign to organize the garment workers.<sup>78</sup>

The chairman and leading light of the CDC was A. G. Forsyth, the secretary of the Brewery Workers' and other unions independent of the CFLU. Forsyth arrived back in Cape Town from a meeting in Johannesburg on the morning of the strike. He acted as much as the agent of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the TLC as he did as the chairman of the scarcely constituted CDC. Both Forsyth and the NEC saw the strike at African Clothing as,

...a unique opportunity of proving to the workers of South Africa that the Council is desirous of assisting any section of the workers who are determined to resist any unjust treatment by the Employers.<sup>79</sup>

In Cape Town the support of the TLC would serve to cement friendship between the workers of the north and the south.

While the progress of the strike was determined by conditions in the Cape Town garment industry and labour movement, the strike had its origins as much in the Transvaal as in the Cape. Without the support given and promised by the Transvaal garment workers' union to the Cape campaign, it is unlikely that the strike would have occurred. Once it began, the strike became the embodiment of the hopes of the Transvaal garment workers' union, the TLC and the CP for establishing a base of worker organization in Cape Town independent of the Cape Federation.

About 70 of the 380 or so workers came out on strike on the Monday morning. All through the week there was peaceful picketing outside the factory and more workers were encouraged to join

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77. The unions included branches of four national unions affiliated to the TLC, the printers, engineers, boilermakers and woodworkers as well as the dockworkers, stevedores and furniture, explosives, breweries, liquor & catering and hotels and boarding house workers (Cape Times 18 August 1931).

78. Letter from Gomas to Sachs, 15 August 1931.

79. Letter from Forsyth to Andrews, 27 August 1927 (GWUSA Archives).

the strike through daily meetings and house visits. Soon about one hundred workers were out. Roytowski betrayed not the least concern about the strike. He told the CWCMA:

The police had the matter well in hand and while they had been prevented from taking any direct action, they had kept the strikers moving and had prevented successful picketing; but nevertheless the pickets had interfered with a number of employees on their way to the factory and made it very unpleasant for them.<sup>80</sup>

The factory continued working, and was apparently little affected. The Cape Times reported that,

...nearly all the women were standing by the employers, but most of the men were on strike...<sup>81</sup>

It continued,

There is no sign of trouble at the African Clothing Factory and the working appears to be normal except for the absence of nearly all the men employees.

At the end of the week M. Miller and G. Malan, organizers of the Transvaal union arrived from Johannesburg. They assisted Forsyth in meeting the management and labour inspector in an effort to settle the dispute. The three immediately became the effective leaders of the strike. Neither Forsyth nor the Transvaal organizers were looking for an honourable defeat. They were under pressure to win the strike if they could. The future security of the Transvaal garment workers' wage standards depended on success in the Cape campaign. There was now no chance of success without a victory in the strike at African clothing. The Transvaal union placed all its hopes on a last, desperate gamble. In Cape Town the issue at stake was not only the future of the hundred workers on strike, but the standing of the Transvaal union and the TLC in the eyes of thousands of Cape workers. Malan told a meeting of 300 garment workers:

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80. CWCMA Minutes: 1 September 1931 - M2/1.

81. Cape Times 26 August 1931.

We have come from Johannesburg to organize you as the Federation of Trades has failed to organize you and we want nothing to do with a union that exists only on paper.<sup>82</sup>

On Saturday 103 workers received strike pay sent down by the Transvaal garment workers' union. Forsyth wrote to Andrews:

Meetings are being held daily and a great amount of propaganda work is being done, the result of which will finally mean the establishment of a proper Union for Garment Workers in the Cape...this generous act (the provision of strike pay - MN) has added fresh courage to the workers.<sup>83</sup>

But no more workers joined the strike as it entered its second week and several who had accepted strike pay returned to work.<sup>84</sup> A new attempt to negotiate with Roytowski ended in deadlock. At a meeting that night Miller was reported as saying:

...the union's representatives were not being backed by the workers. "We are generals without an army", he declared. The workers were not organized, scabs had got into the factory because pickets were not at their posts by seven o'clock.<sup>85</sup>

La Guma,

...urged the members to stand by their leaders. "The stalwarts have remained with us," he said. "For the last week you have fought with the gloves on but the time is coming for us to get into it with our bare hands."<sup>86</sup>

Malan was more cautious. He said,

"If we lose, let us have a fight to lose - a legal fight."<sup>87</sup>

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82. Cape Times 29 August 1931.

83. Letter from Forsyth to Andrews, 25 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

84. Letter from Forsyth to Andrews, 3 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

85. Cape Times 1 September 1931.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

He suggested instituting a civil prosecution against the factory for underpayments.

The workers followed the lead of La Guma. The next morning several cars bringing "scabs" to work through the picket line were stoned by strikers. A force of thirty policemen were on hand as a matter of course and after scuffles between the scabs and strikers and the police, twelve people were arrested. These included La Guma, Gomas, Lazar Bach and seven "girls".<sup>88</sup>

This incident effectively ended the strike. Many strikers were put off by the "disturbances" and did not turn up to picket on the following day. Bail for the three communists was set at £100 each and they stayed in jail overnight while Forsyth, Malan and Miller struggled to find people to stand surety for their release. On Thursday more strikers returned to work and Miller took the train for Johannesburg. Malan continued to hold organizing meetings at other clothing factories but the SAGWU was now dead.

### **3. Dirty Work and Special Pleading**

Although the strike was lost, Forsyth, Malan and Miller were all impressed by the enthusiasm of many workers and the potential which existed for the organization of the Cape clothing workers. Miller reported:

I am convinced that the Cape Town workers can be organized, if a proper person is found to carry on the work. A good number of workers approached me to stay over longer and they would help me to organize. The workers are willing to be organized.<sup>89</sup>

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88. All were later convicted under the Riotous Assemblies Act. Gomas was jailed for three months for perjury. He denied having thrown stones while a police witness said he had (Cape Times 15 September 1931; 26 and 31 October 1931; 12 November 1931; 7 June 1932).

89. 'Report by Mr M. Miller on position in Cape Town', 4 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

He added that the workers were totally disillusioned with "Stuart and his clique" and that the strikers had much appreciated the help from Johannesburg. The strike had shown that there was a crying need for organization. Forty statements were taken from workers at African Clothing detailing all manner of contraventions of the wage determination. The Transvaal organizers found conditions at other factories no better. R. Beattie, the labour inspector, was not able or willing to enforce the determination. Only a strong new union could improve the position.

The Cape Garment Workers' Union would play no role here. After the strike had been in progress a week Evans and Stuart met with the manufacturers. They tried to 'blackmail' them into forming an industrial council. Evans stated,

...the position was very critical. At present the local Union could not claim to be representative and within recent weeks the membership of the non-registered...S.A. Garment Workers' Union had been increased, so that at present it exceeded the membership of their registered Union. What he wished to put to the manufacturers was that they should prevent the control of the employees getting into the hands of the Northern executive, and he suggested that they should assist the employees to establish a Union and in time consider the advisability of forming an Industrial Council...<sup>90</sup>

The manufacturers were wary that a "national union of employees would cause unrest in the Industry", but they did not want to form an industrial council.<sup>91</sup> However they agreed,

...it was advisable to make the Cape Union sufficiently representative as to prevent any danger of its deregistration.<sup>92</sup>

Again they offered to collect subscriptions for the Union under a stop order system. Evans wrote triumphantly to the Registrar that stop order forms had been issued to the employers.

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90. CWCMA Minutes: 1 September 1931 - M2/1.

91. Ibid. Cf. Chapter 4.

92. Ibid.

You will therefore conclude that the union will become completely representative and beyond challenge in this area.<sup>93</sup>

Unfortunately for Stuart and Evans, the threat posed by the SAGWU in 1931 was not great enough to induce the manufacturers to go that one step further and form an industrial council. The GWU-CP was destined to wait another four years before a stronger SAGWU reappeared in Cape Town and did it this service.

Throughout the organizing campaign, the great economic power wielded by the factory owners over workers was apparent. The strike at African Clothing brought into sharp focus the parts played by the Divisional Inspector of Labour, the police and the CFLU in enhancing the power of the employers.

Labour inspectors could reasonably disclaim responsibility for not systematically enforcing the wage determinations - they were far too few. But the conduct of the inspector R. Beattie appears to have shown a strong partiality towards the employers. Beattie regularly inspected the African Clothing Factory and apparently turned a blind eye to many infringements. The Transvaal organizers and Forsyth took down detailed statements from forty workers which showed underpayments, illegal deductions from wages, a failure to give due notice of dismissals and the questionably legal inducement of workers to apply for exemption from being paid the full wage. The affidavits were given to Beattie and a meeting was held for him to question the workers concerned. By the end of September no action had been taken against the employer.<sup>94</sup> In addition Beattie told the press that there was no real dispute and that the strike was illegal. Both Forsyth and Miller reported that the Labour Department sided with the employer in the strike.<sup>95</sup>

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93. Letter from Evans to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 5 September 1931 S.A.B. ARB 1054/306.

94. Letter from Sachs to the secretary of the TLC, 28 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

95. Letter from Forsyth to Andrews, 30 August 1931; 'Report by Mr M. Miller on the position in Cape Town', 4 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

Given the association of the strike with attempts to build a rival trade union centre and rival garment workers' union in Cape Town, the CFLU could not have been expected to give the striking workers direct support. But the leaders of the Federation took an openly hostile attitude to the strike. Evans publicly denounced it as:

...an unjustifiable disturbance of a portion of the industry at a time of terrible depression.<sup>96</sup>

Evans and Stuart had done nothing to organize the garment workers or to challenge the poor conditions - "approaching semi chattel slavery" - which they admitted to exist in the industry.<sup>97</sup> Instead they treacherously conspired with the employers to maintain the paper membership of the GWU-CP at a level which prevented the registration of a union which would try to organize the garment workers and improve their conditions.

The SAGWU was justified in using strong words in a circular to unions asking for financial assistance. It spoke of,

...the dirty work of the leaders of the Cape Federation of Labour, who, together with the Labour Inspector, are working hand in hand with the police and the bosses in a joint effort to break the strike...<sup>98</sup>

The strike was a disaster for the workers who were not re-employed, for the Transvaal union and for the CDC. The goodwill displayed towards the friends from the North while the strike was on was genuine, but it dissipated once the Transvaal organizers returned home and strike pay was not repeated. In 1935, when the Transvaal union again came to the Cape, its desertion of the garment workers in 1931 was remembered. For the CDC, the strike did not prove to be the royal road to the hearts of the Cape workers

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96. Cape Argus 26 August 1931.

97. CFLU Annual Report 1931, page 12 (TUCSA Archives).

98. SAGWU circular, 29 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

that Forsyth had hoped for.<sup>99</sup> The CDC was an irrelevant body for the next four years.

For the AFTU, the losing of a strike was an impossibility. Umsebenzi trumpeted that:

This struggle ended with a victory for the workers; the wage cuts were resisted, the demands such as ten minutes tea time, cessation of the vulgar language of the boss and the managers, sanitary arrangements, were successfully carried through.<sup>100</sup>

The workers had learnt,

...the necessity for building up a strong revolutionary trade union and already a factory committee under the leadership of the AFTU has been set up in the African Clothing Factory to reorganize the fighting forces of the workers for further struggles which are close at hand.<sup>101</sup>

Having goaded the workers into a strike that could not possibly succeed, the AFTU dared to hail its defeat as a victory. It then added insult to injury by distorting the events of the strike to reflect credit on itself and discredit on the Transvaal union and TLC.

The strike coincided exactly with Wolton's most notorious purge of the CP. S.P. Bunting, Sachs, Weinbren, Andrews, C.B.

Tyler of the building workers' union and a host of others were expelled.<sup>102</sup> This cleared the way for an open propaganda war against the reformist line of the TLC, the Garment Workers' Union and other unions who involved the workers in "class collaboration

99. The CDC did not abandon the garment workers. It raised funds to pay for the defense and fines of the "genuine" strikers (Trades and Labour Journal of SA December 1931, p.24). The AFTU branded the TLC "the leader of the fight against the militant workers" for not paying the fines of the three communists (The Hammer November 1931).

100. Umsebenzi 2 October 1931 "Lessons of the Cape Town Garment Strike".

101. Umsebenzi 18 September 1931.

102. Umsebenzi 4 September 1931.



machinery" and abjured "revolutionary trade union work". The striking garment workers in Cape Town were commended by Umsebenzi:

During the struggle the workers refused to swallow the bait of 'Industrial Conciliation' offered to them by the representative of the Garment Workers' Union of the Transvaal and the S.A.T.L.C. and stood solidly for a policy of revolutionary struggle under the leadership of the AFTU.<sup>103</sup>

Umsebenzi revealed that:

...the workers severely condemned the intentions of the S.A.T.L.C. to register the S.A. Garment Workers' Union of the Cape, thus dragging it into the reactionary machine of Industrial Conciliation.<sup>104</sup>

These statements were gross distortions of the truth. Their falsity was betrayed a few weeks later when James La Guma was again expelled from the CP as the Cape district party committee joined the assault on the "Right Danger". Umsebenzi now carried a story that, far from the African Clothing strike having been under the militant leadership of the AFTU, leadership of the strike had been handed over to the TLC by La Guma.<sup>105</sup> La Guma was guilty of "formulating opportunistic deviations and fractional tendencies". He had held up the reactionaries as "'brave leaders of the masses'" and, in his "capitulation before the reactionaries", had failed to convert,

...the struggle against wage cuts into a struggle against the class collaboration policy and the trade union bureaucracy.<sup>106</sup>

The order of expulsion was signed by John Gomas. As secretary and organizer of the SAGWU, Gomas had been instrumental

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103. 18 September 1931.

104. 2 October 1931.

105. 30 October 1931.

106. Ibid.

in involving both the Transvaal union and the TLC<sup>107</sup> in the strike. As late as 18 September he wrote to the Transvaal union to ask for further aid and to express,

...sincere gratitude for your efforts in coming to our assistance, which we appreciate as a deed of working class solidarity.<sup>108</sup>

Leadership of the strike at African Clothing slipped from the grasp of the CP from the first day, when Gomas accepted Forsyth's offer to approach the management.<sup>109</sup> The AFTU and its champions had no slogan or tactic beyond "revolutionary struggle". But they had no revolutionary workers to lead, so they had no alternative but to accept the lead of experienced "social democratic opportunists" like Forsyth and the Transvaal organizers. Gomas was no less responsible for the path taken by the strike than La Guma. His direct participation in La Guma's expulsion for his role in the strike was a base act.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4. Trapped by the Act

The first effort to organize the clothing workers of Cape Town failed. The unfavourable economic climate during the depression was a significant factor in the failure. It made organization extremely difficult and was also a reason behind the sudden withdrawal of Transvaal support for the Cape campaign after September 1931. The intransigence of the TCMA was then forcing the Transvaal union into its first general strike.<sup>111</sup> It needed to

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107. TLC NEC Minutes: 25 August 1931 cited in Touyz (1979, p.55).

108. Letter from Gomas to Sachs, 18 September 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

109. Letter from Forsyth to Andrews, 25 August 1931 (GWUSA Archives).

110. Cf. Simons & Simons (1969, pp.449-50; this paragraph is reproduced for easy reference in Appendix B). Their brief account of the African Clothing strike and the role of La Guma and Gomas is misleading and substantially incorrect.

111. This lasted from 28 October to 19 November 1931.

consolidate all its resources to win.

Other factors, beyond the depression, made Cape Town a hostile environment for independent worker organization. The SAGWU got very little assistance from Cape-based trade unions and relied immoderately on support from the Transvaal. In the early 1930's, the 'left opposition' to Stuart within the CFLU was too weak to overrule or challenge his attitude to the organization of garment workers. The SAGWU's strategy was modelled on the Industrial Conciliation Act. In the context of the Cape Town labour movement this presented particular problems. The Industrial Conciliation Act operated in a different manner in Cape Town from in the Transvaal. The class struggle in Cape Town had, over the previous five years, moulded the Act to accord with its specific character.

In the Transvaal, the Act operated (in company with the Wage Act and government policy) to institutionalize the struggles of white wage earners and grant them limited economic concessions.<sup>112</sup> Transvaal employers were forced to acknowledge the power of organized labour. The conditions of class struggle in the Transvaal and in the Transvaal garment industry allowed the Transvaal garment workers to engage in a real struggle with the employers through the structures of the Industrial Conciliation Act. The Act was framed to help solve problems that confronted the state on the Witwatersrand in the aftermath of the 1922 strike.

No similar problem confronted the state in Cape Town. At the time the Industrial Conciliation Act was promulgated the Cape 'labour movement' was absurdly weak. There was no struggle to institutionalize. In Cape Town, this allowed the Act to secure a different control over the more muted struggles of the working class. In the garment industry it blocked the emergence of an organized or militant trade union by encouraging the formation of a 'bosses union'. The SAGWU faced opposition from the CWCMA, the CFLU and the Department of Labour. These were united, in various ways, through the Industrial Conciliation Act and together they could frustrate the SAGWU's organizational strategy in its first

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112. See Davies (1979, Chapter 5 - especially pp.182-199).

phase, as the union attempted to get official recognition as a registered trade union. For the manufacturers and Stuart and Evans, the Industrial Conciliation Act was a handy and effective defense against the strategy of the SAGWU. The Transvaal-founded union's respect for using the machinery of the legislation virtually guaranteed that the opposing boss-bureaucrat alliance would remain strong and triumphant. The SAGWU's pursuit of participation in the Industrial Conciliation Act as a first principle secured no advances in worker organization. Its desperate resort to strike action brought final defeat. It is spurious to argue, as did the SAGWU in its pamphlets, that calling the African Clothing workers out on strike was calling them to follow the successful path of the Transvaal union. The Transvaal union did not frivolously encourage every urge of the workers to strike. Its strike tactics were wedded to its involvement in the industrial council system. There is no ground for comparison with the promotion of this strike in Cape Town. The SAGWU's earlier, unsuccessful efforts to gain admission to the industrial relations system had laid no basis for a policy of confrontation with the forces ranged against the union.

Since the first clothing factory opened in Cape Town in 1907, the industry has known only three<sup>113</sup> strikes. For this reason alone the strike at African Clothing in 1931 was remarkable. The strike was used as a vehicle for propaganda by the Transvaal garment workers' union, the TLC, the CP and the AFTU and (for an opposite purpose) by the CWCMA and leading elements in the CFLU. Neither the strike, nor the campaign of which it was the culmination, made any contribution to garment worker organization in Cape Town.

The intertwining of class struggles in the garment industries of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, referred to earlier<sup>114</sup>, is, at first sight, most obvious in an analysis of the industry in Cape Town. The Transvaal union invaded Cape Town. The battle was fought out on Cape Town soil. But the Cape Town industry

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113. In 1917, 1931 and 1936. This figure excludes 'stay-aways' and work stoppages lasting less than one day.

114. See pp. 228/9, above.

was hardly affected by the defeat of the Transvaal assault, whereas failure to raise Cape wages in 1931 was a major factor underlying a long and intense struggle between bosses and workers in the Witwatersrand clothing industry. This ultimately led to the virtual destruction of the Transvaal union in the strike of 1932 and a fall in Transvaal wage rates.

## CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND CAPE CAMPAIGN 1935-1938

Four years later, a second effort by the Transvaal union to raise wages and to organize workers in the Cape clothing industry was more successful. Largely as a result of pressure from the Transvaal union<sup>1</sup> the Wage Board issued a new recommendation which made a substantial move towards wage uniformity in the industry. A revived S.A. Garment Workers' Union recruited more than a third of Cape workers as paying members and aroused the spirits of many more to support national unity between the garment workers' unions of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban.

These events, supported by wider worker organization through the rejuvenated local committee of the TLC, were countered by the "Unholy Alliance"<sup>2</sup> between the clothing manufacturers, the Department of Labour and the leaders of the Cape Federation. The employers forced their workers to join the dead but registered GWU-CP by signing stop-order forms. Together, the CWCMA and the officials of the Cape Union formed an industrial council and negotiated wages much lower than in the new wage recommendation advanced by the Wage Board. The Department of Labour registered the industrial council although the GWU-CP had little claim to be a representative union. The Minister of Labour refused to gazette the Wage Board recommendation and legalized the industrial council agreement instead. Supporters of the SAGWU then tried to capture control of the GWU-CP by organizing within it. The Union bureaucrats, after a tussle, defeated these efforts aided by the employers and the Department of Labour.

As a result of the second campaign, the GWU-CP was firmly established as the union for garment workers in Cape Town under the reactionary control of the minions of Robert Stuart. It became part of an industrial council which superceded the Wage Board

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1. Letter from Sachs to J.C. Bolton, Secretary of the Garment Workers' Industrial Union, Durban, 4 September 1935 (GWUSA Archives).
  2. Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. February 1936.

as the arbiter and improver of wages and conditions in the Cape clothing trades.

The chain of events is complicated. It is set out in fairly complete detail in order to provide a solid basis for the conclusions put forward in the next chapter on the nature of the Stuart Machine, the effects of the industrial legislation and the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town. The intention is also to bring to life again a long-forgotten episode of Cape Town labour history.

For a brief period the Cape garment workers, outwardly the very image of submissiveness and docility, were the leaders of a militant labour revival in Cape Town. They were the spearhead of a wider movement to drive out the "rats and traitors"<sup>3</sup> who continually sold the workers to the bosses and kept wages low. From 1935, progressive elements in the Cape Town labour movement began to challenge the long dominance of the Stuart Machine over the Cape Federation and the workers of Cape Town. The second Cape Campaign was fought with mass meetings, court cases, strikes, marches and a style of organizing that shone a spotlight on the Stuart Machine and revealed its true nature. The Campaign gave a decisive momentum to the efforts of the more militant union leaders and workers in a broad range of industries to depose Robert Stuart as the 'king' of the Cape labour movement. The Campaign is thus of crucial significance in the regional labour history of Cape Town. Stuart did win control over the garment workers, but he gradually lost his influence over the rest of the Cape labour movement as a result.

#### 1 Growth in the Cape Town Clothing Industry 1933-1939

The clothing industry in Cape Town recovered quickly after the depression. It grew impressively both as an employer of labour and as a producer of manufactured goods. It is however difficult to give a full picture of the growth of the local industry by using statistics. The industrial census and reports of the Wage

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3. Garment Workers' Union Commission of Inquiry: Evidence of E.S. Sachs, p.1839 (GWUSA Archives, Bca 4). This was a phrase often used by Sachs according to his friend, Mr. E.J. Burford, whom I interviewed.

Board and the Board of Trade and Industries do not give satisfactory regional data - they either aggregate statistics for the whole country or present regional statistics which represent only a section of the local industry. Where figures do exist, it is hard to judge whether data from separate sources is comparable.<sup>4</sup>

For the country as a whole during the five year period between 1933/4 and 1938/9, the number of wholesale clothing factories grew by 42 per cent, from 197 to 280 (Barker, 1961, p.245). The number of garment workers grew by 28 per cent, the gross value of output by 70 per cent, salaries and wages paid by 59 per cent and the gross value added to materials by 75 per cent.<sup>5</sup> This was the precursor to still greater growth during the Second World War. Cape Town, along with the Witwatersrand, was a major growth area. During the 1930's Durban began to develop as a third centre of the clothing industry.

Cape Town remained the leading producer of shirts, pyjamas, and mens' underwear. In 1938 these made up at least two thirds of the value of production in the Cape Town clothing industry.<sup>6</sup> The Witwatersrand dominated all other lines of production including the new women's clothing industry.<sup>7</sup> This is illustrated in Table 6.1.

In 1937/8, the industrial census recorded a total output of £3m for the 248 establishments in the clothing industry in the Western Cape. These included 70 wholesale factories and 145 "retail factories" and tailors.<sup>8</sup>

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4. Barker (1962, p.22) comments: "Authentic data indicating the pattern and the extent of regional development (in the wholesale clothing industry) up to 1938/9 are inconsiderable and appear very irregularly".
  5. The Clothing Industry Report 303 of the Board of Trade and Industries, 9 December 1947, paragraph 2. These figures are apparently based on current values. The retail price index (1938=100) increased from 94,5 in 1934 to 99,9 in 1939.
  6. Wage Board Report: The Garment Making Trades, 21 February 1938 Annexure 190 - 1938, paragraph 69.
  7. Report 303 of BTI op.cit., paragraph 9.
  8. UG 21-1941, Table VI. The remaining 33 establishments were presumably laundries and dry cleaners. The 1938 Annual Report of the Department of Labour suggests that 31 Cape Town factories employed about 83 per cent of garment workers (See Table 6.2, below).



Table 6.1: Value of Clothing Production (Certain Items), 1938/9<sup>9</sup>

	Value (£m)	%
<u>1. Mens' &amp; Boys Outer Garments</u>		
Transvaal	2,160	67
Cape Town	0,873	27
Durban	0,118	4
Rest of Union	0,094	2
	<u>3,245</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>2. Womens' and Girls' Outer Garments</u>		
Transvaal	0,413	80
Cape Town	0,085	17
Rest of Union	0,017	3
	<u>0,515</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>3. Pyjamas and Shirts</u>		
Cape Town	0,907	52
Transvaal	0,335	19
Durban	0,296	17
Rest of Union	0,216	12
	<u>1,754</u>	<u>100</u>

More comprehensive information is available on the changes in employment in the Cape clothing industry. The employment statistics show up the increasing employment of white women workers as noted in Chapter 4. White women increased from 26 per cent of the female labour force in 1931 to 40 per cent in 1934 and 44 per cent in 1937/8. Their numbers fell at the start of the War, while the industry still expanded. By 1943 the percentage of white women had dropped to 27. Table 6.2 also reveals a steady

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9. CCMA Minutes: 2 March 1956 (CCI Archives).

decline in the proportion of 'juvenile' women workers after 1929/30. (This does not necessarily reflect a reduced reliance on cheap 'learners'. The practice of dismissing learners as they became due for higher wages continued right through the 1930's). There are no indicators of changes in the rate of labour turnover in the

Table 6.2: Employment in Cape Town Clothing Factories 1926-1943<sup>10</sup>

DATE	WHITE				'COLOURED'				AFRICAN ASIATIC	TOTAL	% of women workers younger than 21 years	Total weekly wage costs (£)	Average weekly wage (£)
	men		women		men		women						
	A	J	A	J	A	J	A	J					
<sup>a</sup> Feb. 1926	43	12	40	47	159	49	359	368	28	1 105	51	1 368	1.4.9
	55		87		208		727						
<sup>b</sup> Feb. 1927	43	15	47	51	179	37	401	374	20	1 167	49	-	-
	58		98		216		775						
<sup>a</sup> Feb. 1929	55	24	82	301	201	87	448	813	12	2 023	68	3 307	1.12.8
	79		383		288		1 261						
<sup>a</sup> Feb. 1931	78	49	292	296	191	67	685	977	41	2 676	57	4 441	1.13.2
	127		588		258		1 662						
<sup>c</sup> Sept. 1934	208	101	828	912	382	111	1521	1077	114	5 254	46	8 003	1.10.6
	309		1 740		493		2 598						
<sup>d</sup> Mar. 1936	209	62	975	730	242	47	1415	514	61	4 255	34	-	1.13.11
	271		1 705		289		1 929						
<sup>e</sup> 1937-8	347		2 060		670		2 638		63	5 778	-	-	1.12.6
<sup>f</sup> 1938*	322		1 476		562		2 267		157	4 784*	-	-	-
<sup>e</sup> 1943-4	285		1 774		911		4 759		141	7 870	-	-	2.15.0

\* for 31 factories only

A stands for 'Adult', J stands for 'Juvenile' (younger than 21 years.)

10. a. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931, Annexure 82 - 1931-2, Table II.
- b. Social & Industrial Review Special Edition, September 1926.
- c. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935, Annexure 99 - 1936.
- d. Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938, Annexure 190 - 1938, Tables I and IV.
- e. Report 303 of BTI, 1947, Tables XIV and XVII.
- f. Department of Labour Annual Report 1938, UG 51-1939, p.53.

There is no ready explanation for the remarkable fluctuation in employment between 1934 and 1937/8. The Board of Trade Report 303 speaks of the "steady and consistent growth" of the clothing industry between 1933 and 1939. Barker (1961, p.245) refers to "a cyclical movement in a downward direction"

Cape clothing industry. As with the industry elsewhere in the world, this was high.<sup>11</sup> Comparable employment figures for the Transvaal clothing industry are given in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Employment in Witwatersrand Clothing Factories 1929-1943<sup>12</sup>

DATE	WHITE				AFRICAN		'COLOURED'		TOTAL	% of women workers younger than 21 years	Total weekly wage costs (£)	Average weekly wage (£)
	men		women		men	women	men	women				
	A	J	A	J								
<sup>a</sup> 1929	150	25	938	606	539	0	20	107	2 385	40	5 117	1.14.10
		175	1 544									
<sup>b</sup> 1931	140	42	1069	846	489	6	1	125	2 717	44	-	1.17.8
		182	1 915									
<sup>c</sup> Mar. 1936	383	107	3955	1219	588	4	27	102	6 385	23	-	1.19.5
		490	5 174									
<sup>d</sup> 1937-8		569		5 923	1101	8	73	250	7 924	-	-	2.2.6
<sup>d</sup> 1943-4		660		6 322	2313	454	278	1850	11 877	-	-	3.7.0

A stands for 'Adult', J stands for 'Juvenile' (younger than 21 years.)

which "saw some measure of unemployment and short time in clothing factories" but dates this from mid-1937 which is too late to account for the fluctuation. Nowhere in any of the Wage Board Reports or CWCMA Minutes is there a reference to a depression in the Cape clothing industry between 1934 and 1936. The inconsistent set of figures is that for September 1934. Elsewhere in the Wage Board Report from which they were extracted is a table which shows 4 412 women workers as being employed in Cape Town whereas the employment table gives a figure of 4 338. This inconsistency may be an indication of the unreliability of all figures in this report. Otherwise the inflated employment figure of 5 254 may reflect the upsurge in CMT factories at this time and the prosperity of the industry noted in the report.

11. Report 303 of BTI, paragraphs 190-1; Wage Board Report 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 42.
12. a. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931, Annexure 81 - 1931-2, Table IV.  
b. Wage Board Report on its activities March 1929 to December 1931, Annexure 108 - 1933.  
c. Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938 op.cit., Tables I and IV.  
d. Report 303 of BTI, 1947 Tables XIV and XVII.

Thus between 1931 and 1938 employment in the Cape Town clothing industry increased by about 128 per cent, while that in the Transvaal increased by 192 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

Between the depression and the outbreak of the Second World War the membership of the CWCMA increased from sixteen to about thirty, while that of the GWU-CP grew from next to nothing to over 3 000, making it the largest trade union in Cape Town.

## 2 The Transvaal Bastion

The Transvaal garment workers' union emerged from the depression still keenly concerned about the low level of Cape wages. In 1931 and again in 1932 the employers had tried to cut wages down to the Cape Town level. The union prevented any change in the industrial council agreement in 1931 by winning a three week general strike, but a second general strike in the following year ended with the defeat of the workers. The union was forced to agree to wages being set by an arbitrator. Wages were cut across the board by 10 per cent. The major reason given by the arbitrator for imposing the wage reduction was the lower wages paid in the coastal areas.<sup>14</sup>

The Transvaal union was for some time powerless to re-open its efforts to organize and unite with garment workers in Cape Town. The strikes had drained the union of all its reserve funds, the industrial council had collapsed<sup>15</sup> and Sachs was banished from the Witwatersrand for a year under the Riotous Assemblies Act. Workers were demoralized by defeat after they had fought so hard and suffered arrest and assault by the police. Many stopped paying subscriptions and attending meetings.<sup>16</sup> Sachs later commented that the union was "substantially destroyed" by the 1932 strike and had to be rebuilt.<sup>17</sup> This took two years.

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13. See Appendix A.

14. Arbitrator's Report, 27 September 1932 (GWUSA Archives, Bcc 1.20.1).

15. The ICCI (Transvaal) was de-registered by Government Notice No.1226, Government Gazette 16 September 1932.

16. Sachs (1957, p.71).

17. Garment Worker November/December 1950, p.3.

The revived garment workers' union was constructed on the experiences of the general strikes. The strikes had thrown up leaders from amongst the workers who became union officials. New leaders such as the Cornelius sisters, Anna Scheepers, Katie Viljoen and Dulcie Hartwell made the union not simply for the workers but of the workers as well. Under the strong leadership of Solly Sachs, the union grew and thrived as never before. The industrial council was soon resuscitated<sup>18</sup> and wages rose slightly. They remained however five per cent below the pre-depression wages and employers refused to consider a restoration of the full wage as Cape levels remained so much lower.<sup>19</sup>

General conditions in the Transvaal garment industry remained far from satisfactory. In 1934, the union stated:

Fifty per cent of the women workers engaged in the [Transvaal] clothing industry live on what might be called a starvation level, even with their present rate of pay, and not more than five per cent live in anything like ordinary comfort.<sup>20</sup>

The union was convinced that the way for improved conditions in the Transvaal would only be opened if low wage competition from the Cape garment factories were eliminated. The organization of the Cape garment workers thus became a priority for the Transvaal union. Sachs stated:

...to protect the interests of the thousands of garment workers outside Johannesburg and Germiston...and to secure our own conditions, it is absolutely imperative that we concentrate all our efforts on building up a national Trade Union of garment workers, embracing the whole of South Africa.<sup>21</sup>

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18. The ICCI (Transvaal) was re-registered by GN 1687, Government Gazette 8 December 1933.

19. Coastal wages had been further reduced by Wage Determination No.42 in 1932.

20. Memorandum submitted to the Industrial Legislation Commission, September 1934 op.cit.

21. Report of the General Secretary, E.S. Sachs, on his visit to Durban and Cape Town, submitted to the Central Executive Committee of the Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal), May 1935 (GWUSA Archives). (Hereafter, 'Report to CEC').

Such an effort required a strong and stable union in the Transvaal, able to bear the financial and organizational burdens of the campaign. For this reason, the Transvaal union again bargained for a clause in the industrial council agreement to make membership of the union compulsory for all workers.<sup>22</sup> Sachs also sought the active co-operation of the employers in the industrial council. He said that there was,

...an excellent opportunity now of raising the coastal standard of wages and thus solving partly the menace of coastal competition...<sup>23</sup>

His union, he continued, would agree to his going to organize in the coastal areas,

...but only on one condition - and that is that everything be put in order in the Transvaal before I can travel to other centres.<sup>24</sup>

Sachs' specific requests were for the TCMA to ensure that all workers were enrolled in the union and for employers to assist in collecting subscriptions. National unity between all garment workers and between all clothing employers was, he said, desirable for all the parties to the Transvaal industrial council.<sup>25</sup>

There were obviously glaring contradictions in the stated aims of the unity campaign. The Transvaal employers were expecting that higher Cape wages would make the Transvaal factories more competitive and bring them more business and better profits. The Transvaal union expected that a rise in Cape wages would allow Transvaal wages to rise. Cape workers, while seeing the possible benefits which would flow from national unity and higher wages, also feared that the complete removal of a wage differential would lead to the stagnation of the Cape industry, or worse, its removal

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22. Report to CEC, May 1935 op.cit.

23. Report of E.S. Sachs to the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Transvaal) on his visits to Cape Town and Durban, May 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid. Sachs also asked for financial aid from the ICCI (Transvaal) to support his efforts at the coast.

to the Transvaal.

The Transvaal garment workers' union had two strategies to uplift the low standards of the coastal garment workers. The first involved the formation of a national union of garment workers and the provision of material support and advice to the coastal workers in any actions they took to improve their conditions. The second involved using the machinery of the Wage Board to fix a uniform wage scale for the whole of South Africa based on the higher Transvaal standards.<sup>26</sup>

So in 1934, the Transvaal union, backed up by the TCMA, asked the Minister of Labour to order a new Wage Board investigation into the clothing industry.<sup>27</sup> It stated that the industry was now out of the depression and that the specially low coastal rates set by the Board in 1932 prevented the Transvaal industry from paying the wages it could otherwise afford. Much to the chagrin of the Cape manufacturers<sup>28</sup>, the Wage Board again began an investigation in late 1934.<sup>29</sup> The Transvaal union prepared a detailed memorandum and Sachs travelled round the country one step ahead of the Board to marshal workers' support for higher wages and to present evidence on behalf of unorganized workers.

The [Transvaal] Union utilised the public sittings of the Wage Board to expose the bad conditions under which the Garment Workers worked, to rouse the masses of workers from their long sleep, and to appeal to the masses of coastal workers to come into one National Union.<sup>30</sup>

### 3 The Reconnoitre

Sachs arrived in Cape Town in October 1934. He did not contact Stuart or Evans this time as he thought,

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26. 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs', c.1945, paragraph 19 (GWUSA Archives).

27. E.S. Sachs, 'The Struggle of the Garment Workers in the Coastal Areas' (GWUSA Archives, Bce 2.2.2).

28. See CWCMA Minutes: 15 October 1934 - M2/1.

29. Government Gazette 5 October 1934.

30. 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs', c.1945 op.cit., paragraph 19.

...a visit to them would serve no useful purpose. They will not do anything themselves and they will do all they can to hinder others from organizing the workers and trying to improve their conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Instead he approached the Cape Districts Committee of the TLC to ask for its assistance in organizing the garment workers "for the purpose of submitting evidence before the Wage Board".<sup>32</sup> Sachs was testing the water before again plunging into the murky depths of Cape Town worker organization.

The CDC was then weak and hamstrung.<sup>33</sup> Its efforts to expand and consolidate its membership had been nullified by the depression. In 1933 the TLC Annual Conference instructed the CDC to open negotiations with the CFLU on local co-operation (Williams, 1974, p.9). This resulted in the formation of a Joint Committee which had "a tendency to delay certain organizational work"<sup>34</sup> as the Federation demanded consultation before any new organization was undertaken. The Federation tried to use the Joint Council to limit the expansion of the CDC. When Sachs appeared on the scene, the Federation asked the CDC for a guarantee that it would not assist him (Williams, 1974, p.9). A CDC meeting ignored this demand. The CDC reported that there might have to be,

...an open fight...if the Local Committee intended to do any good so far as the organization of the workers was concerned.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Federation was, as ever, firmly opposed to co-operation with the TLC on a national level. Stuart's dominance in the Federation was coming under internal attack. This was led by J.W. Emmerich, a tramdriver who had deposed Stuart as long time secretary of the tramways union. Emmerich was a keen member of the CP<sup>36</sup> and an important ally of the more militant members of the

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31. Letter from Sachs to Andrews, 9 November 1934 (GWUSA Archives).

32. Ibid.

33. Nora Forsyth had taken over as secretary of the CDC in 1932 when her husband A.G. Forsyth succeeded Andrews as general secretary of the TLC.

34. Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. November 1934

35. CDC Report to NEC, TLC on the Joint Committee, 13 December 1934, quoted in Williams (1974, p.9).

36. See CFLU Minutes: 24 July 1933 (TUCSA Archives).



CDC. In 1934 the monolith of the Federation still towered above the Cape labour movement but it was beginning to crack.

The GWU-CP maintained its ghostly existence. In July 1934 the Federation decided to concentrate its efforts on organizing the garment industry "thoroughly"<sup>37</sup> but next to no progress was made. At the poorly attended "annual general meeting" of the Union in January 1935,

Bro. Evans said of Executive Committee work: "Sometimes the work was disheartening but they all felt that the Union must be kept intact, although they did not get much support from the members who were very apathetic, and up to now the number of new members was very small. If it was not for the stop order system operating in a few shops, the Union would have collapsed long ago. There seems no life, and no response from the workers generally, they only thought of the Union when they were out of work or in trouble".<sup>38</sup>

There is no doubt that when Sachs began to organize around the Wage Board investigation, the GWU-CP was not functioning as a trade union.<sup>39</sup> After eight years of registered 'existence' it did not even have a paper membership.

With the aid of the CDC, Sachs held a series of public meetings for workers to tell them of the Wage Board inquiry into their wages and of the need to organize. Six hundred workers attended a meeting the night before the first Wage Board hearing and voted that Sachs should argue their case. Evans represented the Cape 'Union' and put forward a wage scale 25 per cent below Transvaal levels.<sup>40</sup> The publicity around the Wage Board hearing and Sachs' allegations of poor wages and conditions and the flouting of the existing wage determination aroused great interest amongst garment

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37. CFLU Minutes: 3 July 1933 (TUCSA Archives).

38. GWU-CP Minutes: 16 January 1935 - Annexure AA to affidavit of H.L. Evans - Smith v. Crawford and Others Cape Supreme Court Motions 19 (949) 1935, (Cape Archives Depot - C.A.D.).

39. See Chapter 5 above, footnote 23.

40. 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs', c.1945 op.cit., paragraph 21.

workers. Sachs made contact with individual workers who informed him about conditions in their factories and wrote reports to him about the situation in Cape Town when he returned to Johannesburg to complete the negotiation of the Transvaal industrial council agreement. He wrote to one of them:

If we arrive at a satisfactory agreement, one or two of us will proceed to Capetown... and will stop there until such time as we have built up an organization of the garment workers. I know that there are plenty of obstacles in the way, but I do not feel in the least perturbed about it. From what I saw during my short stay in Capetown, I am convinced that the majority of the workers desire to be organized and to fight for better conditions.<sup>41</sup>

In March 1935, the Wage Board circulated a copy of its draft proposed recommendations on the clothing industry.<sup>42</sup> It had found the industry to be in "a very prosperous condition",<sup>43</sup> this being illustrated by high profits and the extension of factories. Consequently the wages proposed by the Board were high.<sup>44</sup> The wage scale represented a significant effort to establish a single wage standard for the clothing industry which would not allow the coastal areas to undermine the standard won by the garment workers' union in the Transvaal. This was the aim of the Board from its first investigation in 1926 and the strong argument of the TCMA and the Transvaal union.

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41. Letter from Sachs to D.L. Lunn, 10 December 1934 (GWUSA Archives).

42. Letter from Sachs to Lunn, 20 March 1935 (GWUSA Archives). Draft proposals were circulated to interested parties whose comments were considered by the Board before it formally submitted its Recommendation to the Minister. Once a Recommendation was gazetted, there was a further 30 day period in which objection could be made before the Board prepared a final Recommendation which the Minister, only then, gazetted as a Wage Determination.

43. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 op.cit., paragraph 10.

44. See Table 6.4, p.356, below. This is a fold-out table which will be referred to frequently.

Sachs immediately wrote to his contacts in Durban and Cape Town to get them to start mobilising all the forces they could in support of the Board's proposals.<sup>45</sup> He anticipated fierce opposition from the Cape employers. Sachs again travelled with the Board as it held a final series of meetings with interested parties before submitting a recommendation to the Minister.

The Transvaal union was now preparing to launch its national unity campaign properly. Sachs came to Cape Town ready to set up a Cape Town branch of his union. This would recruit Cape Town garment workers as members although the Transvaal union was not registered to operate in the Cape and could not be registered as long as the GWU-CP was recognised by the Department of Labour. It was not in any sense illegal for the Transvaal union to organize in Cape Town but as an unregistered union in the area it could not itself make use of the Industrial Conciliation Act.

When Sachs arrived by ship from Durban early in April 1935, John Gomas and Eli Weinberg had booked a hall and printed circulars for a meeting.<sup>46</sup> Two hundred workers attended and responded enthusiastically to the announcement that a branch of the Transvaal union was to be established locally. The meeting elected ten workers to serve on the executive committee.

Before the meeting Sachs had offered David Lunn, a senior worker at African Clothing, the job as paid secretary of the Cape Town branch. Lunn had met Sachs on his previous visit and expressed interest in building a union amongst the garment workers. He had organized about a third of the African Clothing Factory and got them to join the Cape Union.<sup>47</sup> They were the first block of workers to join the Cape Union 'voluntarily' and Sachs was anxious to capture these workers for his branch. But Lunn turned down Sachs' offer. While organizing his fellow workers, Lunn had found that many were extremely suspicious of the motives of

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45. Letter from Sachs to Lunn, 20 March 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

46. Report to CEC, May 1935 op.cit.

47. David Lunn: 'Statement', 1945 (GWUSA Archives - This was one of the affidavits drawn up while Sachs was preparing his defence against a libel action brought by Stuart in 1945. Stuart withdrew before the case was heard in court).

Sachs and the Transvaal union in coming to Cape Town. Some workers remembered how the SAGWU had decamped after using the African Clothing workers as cannon fodder in the 1931 strike. Looking back on these events, some believed that Sachs' aim then had been to create labour chaos in Cape Town to prevent contracts from being completed by the factories and so secure their transfer to the Transvaal. The workers told Lunn not to trust Sachs.

In this situation, Lunn believed that the best chance of organizing Cape garment workers lay in organizing workers into the GWU-CP and then using their support to capture control over the registered union 'from the inside'.<sup>48</sup> Lunn spoke from the floor at Sachs' public meeting and criticised the Transvaal union's unilateral decision to form a rival union in Cape Town. He condemned Sachs for "splitting the ranks of the workers by forming another Union".<sup>49</sup> Sachs responded by dubbing Lunn "a bosses' man" because of his association with the registered union.<sup>50</sup>

Eli Weinberg then accepted the job of secretary at a salary of £10 a month. Sachs described him as "a hard-working, class-conscious and thoroughly reliable comrade".<sup>51</sup> As Sachs planned the Cape campaign, the objective was to compel the Cape clothing manufacturers to form an industrial council with the Cape Town branch. At a later stage this would combine with the councils in Johannesburg and Durban to form a national industrial council. Sachs had no thoughts of 'plant level bargaining' and saw the industrial council system as a useful tool in raising wages. He was not in principle against a weakly organized union joining an industrial council, in fact, in the Transvaal he had found the industrial council a positive aid to proper organization. He wrote to Weinberg:

The setting up of an Industrial Council will certainly mean a step forward in getting access to the masses of workers. Hence we should do all in our power to get a council set up.<sup>52</sup>

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48. Interviews with David Lunn.

49. Report to CEC, May 1935 op.cit., pp.5; 7.

50. Ibid., pp.5; 7.

51. Ibid., p.8.

52. Letter from Sachs to Weinberg, 17 April 1935 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 1.2).

Sachs accurately divined the problems Weinberg was about to encounter.

Of course, (he continued) an Industrial Council can only be established with a registered union which is representative of the industry and there is a grave danger that the Cape bosses will approach the Federation and form a Council behind our backs. You must do all in your power to prevent this happening. The best method is to try and get as many members as possible.<sup>53</sup>

The national unity effort was taking its first faltering steps. Despite the dangers of collusion between the bosses and the Federation leaders, Sachs was optimistic:

The vast mass of workers of Capetown are either opposed to the Federation or do not know of its existence. The name of our Union and its Secretary is held in high esteem. The workers trust us. The Federation does no work until we come and start moving, then they also get busy - as soon as we leave they do nothing. The employers seem to consider us more reliable than the Federation but they fear us more. They know that they can get the Federation to agree to anything they want. We must immediately concentrate all our forces and resources on building up a strong Branch in Capetown. Our conditions are at stake, the making of a national union is at stake. There are many excellent people outside the Trade Unions who will help us. We must utilize everything and everybody to obtain our objective.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4 Siege Defences

Although these warlike preparations were carried out amidst much clamour and were attended by vicious verbal attacks on the Federation and on sweated labour in Cape Town, both the CFLU and the CWCMA were slow to show much concern. They were awakened to the seriousness of the situation only by the publication of the

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53. Letter from Sachs to Weinberg, 17 April 1935 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 1.2).

54. Report to CEC, May 1935 op.cit., p.11.

draft wage recommendation and by the actual launching of the rival union.

In early March 1935, before the draft recommendation had been released, the CWCMA held a desultory discussion with Evans about forming an industrial council.<sup>55</sup> The threat of the Transvaal union was not mentioned in the minutes of the meeting. The debate was whether an industrial council would have any advantages over a new wage determination. The manufacturers had an ambivalent attitude. Some said that policing the payment of wages would be better under an industrial council with its own agent to enforce the agreement. Others said that the new Wage Determination Validation Act<sup>56</sup> would make it equally possible to curb unfair competition from sweaters under a wage determination. Then there was the old question of whether the Minister would accept an industrial council agreement based on the existing wage determination (with which the manufacturers were perfectly satisfied) or whether he would still insist that the new recommendation of the Board be taken over by an industrial council. Evans was agreeable to accepting the old determination as the basis for an agreement. The matter of the industrial council was left in abeyance until the new Wage Board recommendation became available.

The manufacturers were, of course, totally opposed to the new wage scales, which entailed an average increase of about 35 per cent on current rates<sup>57</sup> and in some instances even exceeded the minima in the Transvaal agreement.<sup>58</sup> But so was the Cape Union against the Wage Board proposals. Poole and Evans told the manufacturers,

...they realised that it would bring about more unemployment in the industry and would increase the practice

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55. CWCMA Minutes: 5 March 1935 - M2/1.

56. Act No.16 - 1935. The Act was promulgated on 10 April 1935. Wage Determination 42 had been partly inoperative from 25 October 1933 (Rex v. Cohen, NPD) and totally invalid from 14 December 1934 (Rex v. Ryba, TPD). As its title indicates, the Act made the determinations which had been declared invalid by these court cases legally valid once more. It also allowed future determinations to set minimum wages for pieceworkers. The court cases had found such provisions to be ultra vires.

57. CWCMA Minutes: 25 March 1935 - M2/1.

58. CWCMA Minutes: 21 March 1935 - M2/1.

of employing girls as learners, who as soon as they became entitled to a higher wage, were discharged.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, the Union put forward its own proposals. The CWCMA agreed that,

...the employees' suggestions were very fair and the wage increases they suggested were not nearly as drastic as those proposed by the Wage Board.<sup>60</sup>

In view of the fact that the Union officials "would be willing to co-operate with the manufacturers in opposing the Wage Board's proposed Determination",<sup>61</sup> the manufacturers again considered the question of an industrial council. Now that the Wage Board advised higher wages,

...it would be distinctly advantageous (the chairman suggested) to have an Industrial Council with an Agreement negotiated on the basis of the existing Determination.<sup>62</sup>

The question, however, was whether the Minister would permit this. In the past his policy had been that a newly formed industrial council should take over the new Wage Board recommendations, if the Board was in the process of investigating the industry concerned.<sup>63</sup> There was no point in forming an industrial council with all the expense and bother if wages anyway had to follow the Wage Board recommendation.

Before this issue was clarified, Solly Sachs arrived on his follow-up visit to Cape Town. Sachs stridently declared his intention of forming a national union of garment workers and of fighting to improve wages and conditions in Cape Town. Apart from his meetings with workers, he met with leading employers and W.J. Laite (still the secretary of both the CWCMA and the CCI). Sachs

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59. CWCMA Minutes: 25 March 1935 - M2/1.

60. Ibid. (The details of the suggestion were not minuted).

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. See Chapter 4 above, p. 181.

thought he had made a favourable impression on the employers at the Wage Board sitting and by stressing,

...the advantages of an industrial council and the need to form a strong trade union in the fight against ratshops.<sup>64</sup>

But the employers were very seriously alarmed. Simon Roytowski of African Clothing met Sachs on the morning of 8th April. On the afternoon of the same day, at a meeting of the CWCMA Shirt Section,

Mr. Roytowski assured members that if their employees became allied to the Transvaal Union there would be endless trouble in the industry. Mr. Sachs and his colleagues were aiming at obtaining a higher membership for the new Union than for the existing one and once that was accomplished, they would apply for the existing Union to be de-registered and their's to be registered in its stead. Members would be unanimous that it would be better to negotiate with the Cape Union and be urged that manufacturers should put no obstacles in the way of their employees immediately joining the Cape Garment Workers' Union in order to facilitate the forming of a local Industrial Council and so safeguard the industry from the machinations of the Transvaal agitators.<sup>65</sup>

The manufacturers held a general meeting a week later. This considered a formal request from the Cape Union for another discussion on the formation of an industrial council.

The chairman (William Middlemass) said that recent developments had caused manufacturers to look more favourably on the formation of an Industrial Council than in the past. The statements recently made to the Wage Board by a representative of the Transvaal Garment Workers' Union had shown that the Transvaal Union was making a determined bid to obtain control of the Cape Industry. If a new Union was formed with a greater membership than the present one the Minister would have no

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64. Report to CEC, May 1935 op.cit., p.8.

65. CWCMA Minutes: 8 April 1935 - M2/1.



option but to de-register the Cape Union in favour of the new Union. Members were agreed, he thought, that much value was to be attached to having an Industrial Council which would control the Industry by joint action between employers and employees.<sup>66</sup>

The manufacturers agreed to assist the Cape Union to recruit members in their factories. Once the Union "had reached the strength required for the formation of an Industrial Council",<sup>67</sup> the CWCMA and the GWU-CP could jointly approach the Minister and "request him to gazette whatever Agreement they reached instead of putting the proposed Wage Determination into force".<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile the CWCMA had begun an effort to draw all non-member clothing manufacturers into the Association.<sup>69</sup>

The 'organization' of garment workers into the GWU-CP now began in earnest. The Cape Union, dead to the workers virtually since its registration in 1927, began to hold recruiting meetings in the factories.<sup>70</sup> These were advertised in notices stating that each meeting was held "by kind permission of the Management".<sup>71</sup> New members were enrolled by simply signing stop order forms which authorised their employers to deduct weekly subscriptions from their wages and hand the money over to the Union.<sup>72</sup> In some cases, employers put pressure on workers to sign. If they refused they were told very plainly that they either sign the stop order or take a week's notice.<sup>73</sup>

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66. CWCMA Minutes: 15 April 1935 - M2/1.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. CWCMA Minutes: 9 April 1935 - M2/1.

70. Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. June 1935.

71. Garment Workers' Union (Cape): notice of meeting 8 May 1935 (TUCSA Archives, Dc 8.17 1935). This notice is signed by Stuart, who is designated the union secretary.

72. Garment Workers' Union (Cape): Stop Order No.1750 S.A.B. ARB1054/306. Stop order signing did not, in fact, constitute enrolment under the constitution of the GWU-CP. The deduction of union subscriptions from a worker's wage was itself illegal under clause 4(4) of Wage Determination 42.

73. S.A. Garment Worker 1 (1) May 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

At I.L. Back, Weinberg reported that:

Young Rubin Back, the "socialist", went round the factory with the stop-orders and compelled everybody to sign. When some of them refused, as they had been advised by us, Rubin told them: "You will have to draw the consequences, boys!" So they signed...<sup>74</sup>

Rosie de Freitas, then a seventeen year old machinist at Fraser & Co., later recalled:

Nearly all the workers of Frasers were members of the Cape Garment Workers' Union. They told me that they had been forced to sign a stop-order against their will and did not want to belong to the Union.<sup>75</sup>

Such blatant coercion was probably not as widespread as these quotations suggest, but for the mass of workers 'membership' of the Cape Union began with a stop order and involved nothing more. By this means the enrolment figures of the Cape Union rose meteorically. The inaugural meeting of the (unregistered) 'Industrial Council' was held on 28 May 1935.<sup>76</sup> By this date the Union claimed 1 800 out of 4 500 workers in the industry as its members.<sup>77</sup>

The minute books of the CWCMA alone show conclusively that the Cape Garment Workers' Union was 'organized' in 1935 with the help of the employers and that the bosses and Union officials had the dual and shared aims of preventing the proposed wage determination from becoming law<sup>78</sup> and preventing the growth or registration of a rival union committed to national unity.<sup>79</sup>

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74. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 24 May 1935 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4.1). The letter continues, "...but at the subsequent election of shop stewards one of our comrades was elected."

75. Rose Kemp (nee de Freitas): 'Statement', 1945 (GWUSA Archives).

76. Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Cape) Minutes: 28 May 1935 (Annexure I - Smith v. Crawford and Others, op.cit.). The ICCI (Cape) was registered in February 1936.

77. CWCMA Minutes: 16 May 1935 - M2/1. A month later 2 500 members were claimed (CFLU Minutes: 27 June 1935 - TUCSA Archives).

78. See in addition to the above, CWCMA Minutes: 16 May 1935, p.4 - M2/1.

79. See also CWCMA Minutes: 19 July 1935, p.4 - M2/1.

The aims of the alliance between the bosses and the Union officials were realized, as we shall see, with the connivance of the Department of Labour, the collaboration of the police and the complacency of the courts. Cape garment workers might well have been persuaded that a national union dominated by the Transvaal was not in their best interests but the Union officials and the officials of the CFLU colluded with the employers to exclude the workers from this decision. The task of the rest of this chapter is to show how they succeeded.

## 5 The Beachhead

The Cape Town branch of the Transvaal union adopted the name of the old S.A. Garment Workers' Union. Its immediate aims were to recruit members, to hamper the efforts of the Cape Union and CWCMA to form an industrial council and to undermine and attack the officials of the Cape Union and their supporters in every way possible. When the SAGWU was launched in April 1935, the Cape Union lacked even paper members, but once it awoke and began recruitment, a bitter fight developed between the unions. This conflict both reinforced and was complemented by a sharp deterioration in the relationship between the TLC and the CFLU.

The TLC, with its 26 000 members, was as ever anxious to absorb the CFLU, with its 12 000 members,<sup>80</sup> into a central national trade union co-ordinating body. Failing this, it wanted to establish formal co-operation with the CFLU to lead joint action on general matters affecting labour (such as new legislation, the cost of living and international contacts) and to resolve specific problems (such as the wage disparities between the coast and Transvaal). The CFLU was unco-operative and fiercely independent. Stuart, the dominant figure in the Federation, was extremely antagonistic to the left wing elements in the TLC who wanted to form a "political wing" to the trade union movement and saw trade

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80. Letter from W. Freestone (President, CFLU) to the Minister of Labour, 8 March 1935 (printed in Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. April 1935). These figures represent the claimed membership of affiliated unions. Affiliation fees received by the two bodies at this time were £1 231 per annum for the TLC and £237 per annum for the CFLU.

unionism as a means to political ends.<sup>81</sup> He was intent on keeping the Cape Town labour movement under his control and as free as possible from such 'white anting'.

Faced with the growing intransigence of the leaders of the CFLU, the CDC withdrew from the Joint Committee early in 1935.<sup>82</sup> In April the Annual Conference of the TLC resolved to appoint a special organizer for the Cape. His task was to organize new unions in Cape Town "to create an alternative power base from which to push the unity movement" (Williams, 1974, p.10). There was no intention to subvert existing Federation unions, but the Federation interpreted this move as a hostile act to break its influence in the Cape.<sup>83</sup> Such a view appeared quite correct once the fight in the garment industry got under way. The severing of all friendly contact between the TLC and the CFLU removed all restrictions from the actions of the CDC. The CDC was revitalised and helped the Transvaal garment workers' union's efforts to establish its own alternative power base for its own unity movement.

Eli Weinberg, the secretary of the SAGWU in Cape Town, was then 27 years old. He had arrived in South Africa in 1929 having fled from persecution for trade union activities in Latvia.<sup>84</sup> In 1933 he was sent by the Communist Party in Johannesburg to assist the local party committee in Cape Town. Sachs was happy that Weinberg should use the SAGWU office as a base for whatever party work or other organizing he had time for - so long as he organized the garment workers.<sup>85</sup>

The attitude of the CP to industrial legislation had reverted to accepting it as a guide to union organization.<sup>86</sup>

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81. Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. October, November 1934. Stuart's attitudes are ponderously expressed in CFLU Annual Reports and, from 1936 in a new monthly journal, Cape Federation of Labour Unions: Official Organ.

82. CFLU Minutes: 7 February 1935 (TUCSA Archives).

83. CFLU: Official Organ March 1937.

84. Forward 29 November 1935.

85. Weinberg was extremely active. His trade union concerns covered the CDC and the sweet workers as well as garment workers. He was an activist in the Anti-Fascist League, the Friends of the Soviet Union and on May Day organizing committees. He wrote many articles and letters in The Guardian, Forward and The Sun on a wide range of subjects.

86. This even preceded the official change in line to a 'people's front' against fascism after the 1935 congress of the Comintern.

Weinberg later recalled that:

Solly's idea was that we should build up an alternative union with the eventual aim of either superceding the existing union or possibly coming to an agreement with them for higher wages and better conditions and negotiating a new industrial council agreement.<sup>87</sup>

The SAGWU opened its office at 57 Plein Street on May Day 1935. It offered members "free medicine, free medical attendance and free legal advice".<sup>88</sup> It held public meetings addressed by TLC speakers, Cissie Gool, Goolam Gool and Dr. Abdurahman. Workers were invited to meetings at the office and to "tea parties" at the homes of SAGWU supporters. Workers were visited at their homes and addressed outside factories. The message was to join the SAGWU and help the fight for better wages and conditions. The need to support the Wage Board recommendations and the need for national unity were stressed but the SAGWU believed that:

The best means of enrolling members into our Union is to show the workers by our activities that we really defend their interests.<sup>89</sup>

Workers were encouraged to come forward with complaints. As workers were often scared of being victimised should their individual complaint become known to their employer, the SAGWU first approached the local labour inspectors. When this produced little success, the SAGWU loudly complained of the non-enforcement of the wage determination in the press. A pamphlet was issued showing workers the wages they were entitled to under the determination<sup>90</sup> and the SAGWU systematically began to collect details and proof of determination evasions and the refusal to enforce the law on the

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87. Transcript of interview with Eli Weinberg, December 1976. I am indebted to Baruch Hirson for allowing me to use this document.

88. SAGWU Pamphlet advertising a meeting for 9 May 1935 (GWUSA Archives). The doctors who agreed to see the SAGWU members free included Dr. Goolam Gool and his brother (Report to CEC, May 1935, op.cit.).

89. 'Report of Comrade E. Weinberg to the first general members' meeting of the S.A. Garment Workers' Union, Monday 3rd June 1935' p.2. (GWUSA Archives).

90. Ibid.

part of both the Labour Department and the public prosecutor.<sup>91</sup> All the evidence was presented to Smuts, the Minister of Justice, in October 1935.<sup>92</sup> Sachs personally took statements from 424 workers (about a tenth of the entire industry) which showed wholesale contravention of the determination<sup>93</sup> and the partiality of labour inspectors to the employers.<sup>94</sup> Sachs later recalled:

We arranged public meetings and exposed the wholesale corruption which prevailed and demanded that the laws governing wages should be enforced against the employers with the same vigour as the anti-strike laws against the workers.<sup>95</sup>

The SAGWU arranged social events such as dances and picnics and held political education classes in the office.

After a month the SAGWU held its first general members' meeting. It then had 142 members. At the meetings a permanent committee was elected and Eli Weinberg was elected to continue as secretary. The office rent and other expenses, as well as Weinberg's salary, were paid from monthly contributions from the Transvaal union.

The SAGWU started organizing just at the time Evans was beginning his visits to the factories with the books of stop order forms for workers to sign. The SAGWU responded to this move with an intensive propaganda drive. It made much of the fact that the Cape Union advertised its meeting as being under the auspices of the factory owners and questioned why this union, which had never even been a name to most workers, had now suddenly become active. The answer, the SAGWU said in a pamphlet, was that,

The employers...wish the Cape Federation of Labour Unions to build a BOSSES' UNION for them!

...The employers do not want increased wages; they wish to avoid such a wage determination, and they are out

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91. 'Memorandum submitted to the Honourable the Minister of Justice Regarding the Non-Enforcement of Determination No.42 and Determination No.44, Cape', 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

92. Cape Argus 30 October 1935.

93. Statement of E.S. Sachs, 22 March 1949, paragraph 63. (GWUSA Archives, Bcc 1.20.1).

94. 'Memorandum...', op.cit.

95. E.S. Sachs 'The Struggle of the Garment Workers in the Coastal Areas', p.164/20 (GWUSA Archives, Bce 2.2.2).

to set up an Industrial Council with the assistance of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions, in order to BIND YOU DOWN TO THE PRESENT LOW WAGE LEVEL FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.<sup>96</sup>

But the SAGWU was not yet organized inside any factories and was unable to prevent the Cape Union from signing up a growing number of workers. Weinberg stated that:

...many workers have been forced to join the other Union. The bosses simply threatened them with victimisation and other measures.<sup>97</sup>

There was intimidation of this sort in several cases,<sup>98</sup> but many, probably most, workers did not understand much about trade unions and were "fooled"<sup>99</sup> and scared as much as directly coerced into signing stop orders associating them with the GWU-CP. Duncan Burnside MP stated in Parliament:

The employers made the union...by the simple process of going round to their workers with stop orders and saying, "You sign that". In some instances...the employer actually threatened the employee that if she... did not sign, she would get the sack. But in most instances it was not necessary to sack. Such are the conditions in the garment workers' industry, such is the fear, such is the intimidation engendered into these people, that it is only necessary for the employer to put down a piece of paper and say, "You sign," and they sign.<sup>100</sup>

Weinberg reported to the general meeting:

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96. SAGWU Pamphlet advertising a meeting for 27 May 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

97. 'Report of Comrade E. Weinberg...', 3 June 1935 op.cit., p.5.

98. See CWCMA Minutes: 4 October 1935 (M2/1) and Forward 13 October 1935 on intimidation by Victoria Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers (Pty) Ltd.

99. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 15 May 1935 (GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4.1).

100. Hansard 18 March 1936, 1510-1511.

Today we are in such a position that most of the garment workers have joined, if you call that joining, the other Union.<sup>101</sup>

Consequently the SAGWU supporters should work inside the Cape Union,

...to expose to the workers that the leaders of that other Union are not out to defend their interests.<sup>102</sup>

The aim was to prise workers away from the Cape Union and to destroy it.<sup>103</sup> Weinberg said:

I think that by careful work we will succeed in winning all the workers over to our side. The most important thing is that we must really take up the grievances of the workers and fight for them, so that they can see with their own eyes which is their Union. So the basis of our policy is a relentless and uncompromising fight against all bosses in the interests of all garment and tailoring workers.<sup>104</sup>

The Cape Union went about the formation of the industrial council and the negotiation of an agreement amidst great secrecy. The negotiations were conducted by self-appointed officials and a self-appointed executive committee. General meetings of the Union were due every month in terms of the constitution. But not one was held. In 1927 the officials of the Union had their painfully negotiated agreement repudiated at a general meeting when, as in 1935, it contained wages lower than those recommended by the Wage Board.<sup>105</sup> By 1935, the officials had learnt their lesson from history. They were not again going to make the mistake of asking a general meeting to approve the agreement or even the formation of an industrial council. This would be playing into

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101. 'Report of Comrade E. Weinberg...', 3 June 1935 op.cit., p.5.

102. Ibid.

103. Not yet (as was later the case) to capture the union from the inside as David Lunn proposed.

104. 'Report of Comrade E. Weinberg...', 3 June 1935 op.cit., p.5.

105. See Chapter 4, p.178, above.



the hands of the growing rival union. Token meetings for specific factories were held in early July for members to "confirm" the agreement<sup>106</sup> but no general meeting was allowed to decide on the matter as required by the Union's constitution.

The position of the SAGWU was greatly strengthened in mid-July when, at long last, the recommendations of the Wage Board appeared in the Government Gazette.<sup>107</sup> This provided the rival union with a new organizing focus which promised tangible benefits to workers. The proposed wages were substantially more favourable to workers than the 'industrial council' agreement.<sup>108</sup> But the SAGWU made the error of assuming that this publication of the recommendation amounted to a positive statement by the Minister of his intention to gazette it as a new wage determination.<sup>109</sup> The union thought that garment workers were now guaranteed at least the minima set in the Wage Board recommendation whether the 'industrial council' was formed or not.<sup>110</sup> They used the publication of the recommendation to encourage workers to resign from the Cape Union and join the SAGWU, which all along had campaigned for the Wage Board proposals. Now that higher wages were as good as assured, the absolute priority was to stop the registration of an industrial council comprising the CWCMA and their stooge union, the GWU-CP.

The CWCMA, however, "had the sympathy of the Department of Labour".<sup>111</sup> The Divisional Inspector told the manufacturers that if the Minister received the proposed 'industrial council' agreement before 12 August and if he "was satisfied that the employers had

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106. Cape Peninsula Garment Workers' Union (Registered) Pamphlet: 'Home Rule in the Cape Clothing and Shirt Manufacturing Industry', July 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

107. 12 July 1935.

108. The first draft of the agreement provided lower wages for qualified workers than were finally settled upon. See Table 6.4, p. 356, below.

109. See SAGWU Pamphlet advertising a meeting for 25 July 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

110. Sachs wrote: "...after the Minister has published his intentions of publishing the original recommendations of the Board as a Determination (Govt. Gazette 12/7/35), it is extremely unlikely that he will now desist from making a new Determination in spite of all rumour". Letter to J.C. Bolton, 4 September 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

111. CWCMA Minutes: 19 July 1935 - M2/1 (Mr. L.H. Lewis, p.5).

made a reasonable attempt to meet the situation",<sup>112</sup> he would accept the agreement even if it set lower wages than the new Wage Board proposals.

The manufacturers were now intent on forming an industrial council at all costs. Roytowski,

...said the North were determined to rule the Clothing Industry in the South and he felt that the Industry should fight even if it meant they had to pay the wages as laid down by the Wage Board to get the Industrial Council registered and so have control of the Industry themselves.<sup>113</sup>

Jacobs,

...stated that Mr. Sachs' great argument was that Mr. Evans was acting in the interests of the "bosses". He was said to have sold the employees because the Industrial Council Agreement laid down the wages of a qualified (female) worker at 42/6d. Mr. Sachs had said that he would see that the workers got 45/-. Mr. Jacobs felt that employers should endeavour to meet employees by giving an increase of 12 1/2% on present wages which he thought would be a fair arrangement satisfying both the employers and employees, and would also squash the argument of Mr. Sachs.<sup>114</sup>

This suggestion was accepted. As a result of the SAGWU campaign and independently of any request from the Cape Union, the bosses raised the wage of qualified women machinists up to the level proposed by the Wage Board. The wages of learners remained substantially below those put forward by the Wage Board and the 'agreement' divided qualified workers into eight divisions, each with a different qualified wage. As a result, certain jobs (for example packers, cleaners, markers and sorters) had lower qualified minimum wages than under the existing wage determination. The Wage Board

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112. CWCMA Minutes: 19 July 1935 - M2/1 (W.J. Laite).

113. Ibid., p.4.

114. Ibid., p.6.

set flat minimum rates for men and women while the 'agreement' set minima for specific jobs, allowing employers to make small cost reductions. The Wage Board proposed one week's leave on full pay per year; the 'agreement' allowed two days paid leave.<sup>115</sup> The 'agreement' also enabled the industrial council to grant exemptions to up to ten per cent of a factory's workforce "who by reason of slowness are unable to earn the minimum wage".<sup>116</sup> In virtually all respects, the proposals of the Wage Board were more favourable to the workers than those of the 'industrial council'.<sup>117</sup>

The revised 'industrial council agreement' was sent to the Minister at the end of July 1935 with the request that he register the council and gazette the agreement.<sup>118</sup> The activities of the SAGWU, meanwhile, were reaching new heights. Solly Sachs returned to Cape Town in July to help with organization for six months. By September the SAGWU had a paying membership of 750.<sup>119</sup> The union was increasingly visible to workers with more meetings, pamphlets and house visits. Sachs wrote to J.C. Bolton of the Garment Workers' Industrial Union in Durban,

Our influence amongst the thousands of non-members is enormous and if the bosses here would not intimidate the workers we should have a membership running into thousands. At our last mass meeting we had over 500 present...Our membership is growing daily and so is our influence, and in spite of all the obstacles, treachery and attempts to mislead the workers, we feel confident that in the near future we shall have the majority of the Cape workers in our ranks.... The Cape Town workers

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115. Clause 8.5.

116. Clause 8.4.

117. The above comparison is based on the Wage Board recommendation (Government Gazette 12 July 1935) and the 'industrial council agreement' sent to the Minister late in July 1935 (Annexure BB - Smith v. Crawford and Others op.cit.). See also 'Comparison of Wage Scales between Determination No.42 (Clothing Industry) and Agreement (Cape) published in the Government Gazette of April the 3rd 1936' (GWUSA Archives, Ccb 1.2.1.3).

118. ICCI (Cape) Minutes: 24 July 1935 (Annexure K - Smith v. Crawford and Others op.cit.).

119. Letter from Sachs to J.C. Bolton, 4 September 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

want the terms of the Wage Board recommendation and will accept nothing less, they will do everything in their power to prevent the imposition of an agreement upon them with less favourable conditions.<sup>120</sup>

Sachs marched around Cape Town like a showman - picking arguments with the bosses and Cape Federation officials, bragging about the successes of the Transvaal union and exuding arrogance and self-assurance.

Roytowski told a CWCMA meeting,

...that somebody in the Association was handing Sachs copies of the minutes. Mr. Sachs had produced copies of minutes to him, and had been able to tell him of certain remarks he had made at meetings which were not even recorded in the minutes. Messrs. Andrews, Weinberg and Sachs could be seen sitting in public cafes with coloured girls from the factories. One of his firm's girls had been picked to go to Russia, and Sachs came in and said he presumed that this girl's job would be kept open for her while she was away.<sup>121</sup>

The SAWGU inundated the Labour Department with allegations of the evasion of the wage determination<sup>122</sup> and employers had to fend off a growing number of complaints from inspectors ("the majority of which", said the CWCMA, "on enquiry are found to be untrue"<sup>123</sup>).

So although the Cape Union claimed 2 700 members, the manufacturers did not feel as secure as they would have wished. They took the matter up with Evans. One manufacturer told Evans that,

...(his) Union was not working as hard to obtain new members as they ought to. He found from 12 to 16 operatives dropping out of the Union after Mr. Sachs had

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120. Letter from Sachs to J.C. Bolton, 4 September 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

121. CWCMA Minutes: 4 October 1935 - M2/1.

122. CWCMA Minutes: 19 July 1935 - M2/1.

123. CWCMA Minutes: 4 October 1935 - M2/1.

visited the factory. They were allowing them to be lost after getting them to join the Union.<sup>124</sup>

Jacobs,

stated that Mr. Sachs was very active, and disputed wage rates, etc. He thought that Mr. Evans ought to do a little more propaganda work and that 12 of his employees had resigned out of 250 members.<sup>125</sup>

He stated that the GWU-CP ought to attack the statements of the SAWGU that "the local Trade Union had never looked after the interests of the employees".<sup>126</sup>

Evans replied that only 85 workers had in fact resigned and that the Union would issue a circular within a week to inform workers of Union doctors and chemists and of the "Lady Welfare Visitor" who had been appointed.<sup>127</sup>

Under the influence of the SAGWU campaign some workers began to gain in confidence in the factories. A significant number renounced the stop orders they had signed and openly joined the SAGWU. Employers found a new attitude of defiance amongst some of their workers. Middlemass,

...pointed out (to the CWCMA) that it was quite impossible to deal with employees with the same independence as formerly - times had changed.<sup>128</sup>

One forewoman told her employer,

...that he could not boss her about, as she had Mr. Sachs behind her.<sup>129</sup>

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124. CWCMA Minutes: 13 August 1935 - M2/1 (Mr. Gasgarth).

125. Ibid., p.6.

126. Ibid., p.7.

127. Ibid. This post was held by Mrs. E. Noble, an executive member of the Union since 1927, at a salary of £12 a month. (Affidavit of Reginald Smith, p.11 - Smith v. Crawford and Others op.cit.).

128. CWCMA Minutes: 17 February 1936 - M2/1.

129. CWCMA Minutes: 4 October 1935 - M2/1.

Employers did not know how to cope with the obvious effect which the SAGWU was having on their workers. H. Furman of Victoria Clothing called the police to remove Sachs and Weinberg from his factory when they tried to hold a meeting inside it. Furman's brother told Sachs,

...that if any of his employees joined Mr. Sachs' Union, they would be dismissed from the factory.<sup>130</sup>

The SAGWU made a great deal of publicity around this incident. Sachs told Furman he would call the workers out on strike unless he stopped his interference.<sup>131</sup> The SAGWU issued a series of demands and threatened to apply for a conciliation board if they were not acceded to.<sup>132</sup>

Middlemass thought it was very unfortunate that this incident had occurred. It was "a tactical error". "It was giving Sachs ammunition to use against them".<sup>133</sup> He said:

...any action such as Mr. Furman had taken was most inadvisable...they should let their workers join any Union they liked without influencing them in any way.<sup>134</sup>

The other manufacturers concurred. Jacobs said:

...(he) thought that Mr. Furman should take steps to state publicly that the workers at his factory were absolutely free to join any Trade Union they wished, and that what he had meant to convey previously was that he favoured them joining the Cape Garment Workers' Union.<sup>135</sup>

In the space of six months the Transvaal union had established a secure beachhead in Cape Town. The SAGWU campaign was directed at building an organization of Cape garment workers to challenge their bosses. The union initiated confrontation with the bosses over the right to organize and the evasions of the wage determination.

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130. CWCMA Minutes: 4 October 1935 - M2/1.

131. Ibid.

132. Forward 13 October 1935.

133. CWCMA Minutes: 4 October 1935 - M2/1.

134. Ibid.

135. Ibid.

It also put pressure on the Minister to gazette the new wage determination – this being the swiftest means at the time of improving wages and conditions. It was on the basis of this real union activity that the SAGWU challenged the existence of the Cape Garment Workers' Union.

#### 6 The Beleaguered Cape Union

The Cape Union still did not submit the decision to form an industrial council or the 'agreement' to a meeting of its members.<sup>136</sup>

Sachs wrote to Bolton:

Over 2 000 workers have Union dues deducted from their wages, but no general meetings have been held because the self-appointed leaders are afraid to face the workers. These same leaders have also concluded an agreement behind the backs of the workers with lower wages and worse conditions as compared with the recommendations of the Wage Board. Of course this agreement is not worth the paper it is written on, and very shortly we hope to put the self-appointed leaders in their places.<sup>137</sup>

In September, some 27 SAGWU sympathisers who were members of the Cape Union signed a petition requesting the union leaders to hold a general meeting. Under the constitution of the Union it was obligatory for the leaders to hold a general meeting if twenty workers requested this. The leaders ignored the petition. Sachs then decided to launch a legal challenge to the Union leaders. He arranged for one of the petitioners, Reggie Smith, to bring a Supreme Court action against Evans, Freestone and the Union executive to force the Union to abide by its constitution. Smith sought an interdict to stop the executive from participating in the establishment of an industrial council until a general meeting had been held to allow members to vote on the matter.<sup>138</sup>

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136. Letter from Weinberg to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 10 September 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/514.

137. Letter from Sachs to Bolton, 4 September 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

138. Smith v. Crawford and 6 Others (15, 16, 21 October 1935, CPD, not reported).

The case proved highly embarrassing to the Cape Union. Evidence presented to the court<sup>139</sup> indicated that the Union was completely dominated by Stuart and the Federation bureaucrats who surrounded him - none of whom was a garment worker. This clique ran the Union with scant regard for the constitution not only as far as concerned the rejection of members' petitions but also in the general administration of the Union. The Union constitution allowed great flexibility for members to exercise their rights of participation and control.<sup>140</sup> The general meeting of members was the most powerful body inside the Union and all but day to day matters had to be decided by a general meeting. The executive had little power in itself - certainly not the power to form an industrial council and bind members to an agreement without the majority vote of a general meeting. The constitution was open and democratic. But the constitution was never adhered to. There was doubt as to whether the Union in 1935 had a single properly elected official or executive member.

The judge, Mr. Justice Jones, granted the interdict. He slated the Union officials,

It seems to me that everything that has been done on the part of the Executive Committee in constituting an Industrial Council and coming to an agreement with employers was improperly and irregularly done....While they were denying the general body of members the right to express their views upon matters of supreme importance to the workers in the industry, they proceeded to effect amendments to the constitution... and enter into agreements with the employers materially affecting the interests of the workers. The papers before me indicate that the respondents, knowing what they were doing was irregular and contrary to the constitution, deliberately and without any justification re-

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139. See Cape Supreme Court: Motions Volume 19 No.946 1935 (C.A.D.).

140. 'The Constitution of the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula' (Annexure B - Smith v. Crawford and Others op.cit.).



frained from doing their duty and when requested to do what they were required under the constitution to do, turned a deaf ear to the request. Not only was their conduct grossly unreasonable, but I venture to think that it was lacking in bona fides.<sup>141</sup>

The judgement was a severe blow to the prestige of the Cape Federation as well as to the GWU-CP officials. William Freestone, the paid secretary of the Union, was president of the CFLU. Forward printed the entire judgement under the heading "Dictators on the Run".<sup>142</sup> The court case also interfered with the rapid registration of the proposed industrial council. But the Cape Union was scared to call a general meeting while the SAGWU was making such an impact on the workers. Stuart approached the manufacturers and asked them to agree to employ only Cape Union members. This, he hoped, would put an end to the Transvaal's interference. The employers did not think that the blunders of the Cape Union officials could be so easily brushed aside. One of SAGWU's fighting points was its right to organize and Sachs had threatened to cause strikes over this issue only a few weeks previously. Roytowski told Stuart that the manufacturers "were not justified" in agreeing to his request "in view of the way the Union was being run".<sup>143</sup> Jacobs agreed.

(He) thought it would be a fatal step for the employers to do this at the present time. It would be placing a weapon in Sachs' hands.<sup>144</sup>

The CWCMA meeting made clear to Stuart their dissatisfaction with the Cape Union. Jacobs said,

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141. Judgement: Smith v. Crawford and Others (CSC Motions 19 (946) 1935 - C.A.D.). Jones ordered that the costs of the case be borne by Evans, Freestone and four executive members in their personal capacities and not by the Cape Union.

142. Forward 8 November 1935.

143. CWCMA Minutes: 7 November 1935, p.5 - M2/1.

144. Ibid., p.7.

...that if Mr. Stuart did not mind him saying so, he thought that the Union was going about the formation of their Union in a very slipshod manner...for every once Mr. Evans had been going out, Mr. Sachs had been going out about a dozen times. Unless the Union became more active they would lose entire control. There was no initiative amongst their Executive members, whereas the other people were at it all the time, getting into touch with the employees, taking them out to tea and all that kind of thing.<sup>145</sup>

The manufacturers were particularly concerned about the way in which the GWU-CP had successfully been dubbed a bosses' union. They urged the Union to distance itself from them in order to gain credibility with the workers.

Mr. Mauerberger said that the cause of all this trouble was certain grievances that the employees were complaining about....They had to look for the cause of the trouble, and he told them that there was a definite decision amongst the workers that they had no confidence in Mr. Evans' Union, and unless the Union woke up and took action against the manufacturers or anybody else, to show that they were a live body, they would lose the support of the employees. The Union must be militant.<sup>146</sup>

The Cape Union was under attack from both the workers and the manufacturers for being a bosses' union.

The CWCMA secured an undertaking from Stuart that the Union would hold a general meeting soon. The CWCMA minutes record:

Mr. Stuart said that he promised that whatever they did at this meeting would be within the four walls of the Constitution. They might get out two or three handbills pointing out the main benefits of the new Industrial Council agreement and ask the manufacturers to distribute them.<sup>147</sup>

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145. CWCMA Minutes: 7 November 1935, p.4 - M2/1.

146. Ibid., pp.6,7.

147. Ibid., p.8.

The agenda of the general meeting consisted of a series of resolutions which "ratified" all the actions of the Executive over the previous year in enrolling new members, forming the 'industrial council' and signing the 'agreement'.<sup>148</sup> It was vital to the future of the Cape Union that these resolutions be carried. The Cape Union officials knew that the SAGWU and its supporters were mobilizing workers to defeat the resolutions. They took defensive measures. The night before the general meeting<sup>149</sup> they informed at least fourteen leading supporters of the SAGWU that they had been suspended from membership of the GWU-CP "for openly supporting the chairman of the hostile invading union".<sup>150</sup> Several suspended members applied to the Supreme Court for an urgent order that they be permitted to attend the general meeting.<sup>151</sup> The application was heard by Justice Jones, who was well acquainted with the background to the case, but he refused to grant the order as this,

...would constitute an interference in the internal affairs of the union.<sup>152</sup>

The meeting was held in an uproar. The Cape Argus reported that, despite the presence of policemen in and outside the City Hall, "pandemonium reigned for the greater part of the meeting".<sup>153</sup> Poole was in the chair and he refused to take questions or allow the meeting to elect its own chairman. He rejected the demand that the vote be by ballot.<sup>154</sup> Evans had brought with him a band

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148. GWU-CP Pamphlet advertising general meeting in the City Hall on 26 November 1935 (Annexure C - Ex Parte Ernest Petersen and 5 Others Cape Supreme Court: Motions 22 (1088-1093) 1935 C.A.D.).

149. Letter from Freestone (secretary GWU-CP) to Rose Crawford, dated 23 November 1935, delivered 25 November 1935 (Annexure D - Ex Parte Ernest Petersen and 5 Others op.cit.).

150. Letter from Poole to Registrar, Cape Supreme Court, c.27 November 1935 (Filed in Ex Parte Ernest Petersen and 5 Others op.cit.).

151. Ex Parte Ernest Petersen and 5 Others (26 November 1935, C.P.D., not reported).

152. Jones J. in Ex Parte Ernest Petersen and 5 Others op.cit.

153. 27 November 1935.

154. CDC Pamphlet: 'To all Trade Unions, Trade Unionists and Workers', c.12 December 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

of "chuckers-out"<sup>155</sup> from the lorry drivers' and bakers' unions who physically ejected people who tried to address the meeting from the floor. Amidst "whistles, cat-calls and yells"<sup>156</sup> Poole declared all the resolutions to be carried. The CFLU and Cape Union officials knew they were involved in a fight to the death and were losing. They could not afford to be generous with democracy.

The CDC issued a protest pamphlet:

Clear the bosses' friends out of the Trade Union Movement!...We call upon all trade unionists and honest workers to come to the aid of the garment workers by condemning the Hitler-Mussolini tactics of Messrs. Evans and Co., by demanding that the malicious suspensions from the Union be immediately cancelled and the suspended members be reinstated, by demanding that the garment workers be allowed to express their opinions freely and in a democratic and constitutional manner on matters of the most vital importance to them.<sup>157</sup>

But the damage was done. The general meeting had been a major defeat for the SAGWU.

This was followed by another setback in the struggle against the Cape Union officials. The GWU-CP won an appeal it had lodged against the judgement in Smith's action against the Executive.<sup>158</sup> There, Justice Jones had ordered the holding of a general meeting as the Union officials had flouted the constitution and, he suggested, were acting in bad faith. In the appeal, to a full bench of the Supreme Court, Justice Watermeyer held that the order should have been refused as the petition for the meeting had not been issued in proper form (it did not state the business of the requisitioned meeting). He continued to ask rhetorically:

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155. Cape Argus 27 November 1935.

156. Cape Times 27 November 1935.

157. CDC Pamphlet: 'To all Trade Union...' op.cit.

158. *Garment Workers' Union and Others v. Smith* (1936 C.P.D. 251), 10 and 24 December 1935.

Upon what ground can the Court interdict the executive from doing unconstitutional acts which may have the approval of the majority of members and which the majority intend to ratify?<sup>159</sup>

This judgement had no practical effect as the general meeting had now been held, but it gave the Cape Union a propaganda victory which they referred to gloatingly for the next ten years. More important was that this judgement indicated that the courts could not, in general, be relied upon to ensure democratic procedures within trade unions.<sup>160</sup> Once permission to appeal against Watermeyer's judgement had been refused,<sup>161</sup> the SAGWU halted the legal efforts it was making to challenge the validity of the November 26 meeting.<sup>162</sup>

The Cape Union was fighting back and making significant gains everywhere except amongst the workers. It began to issue replies to SAGWU and CDC propaganda.

This hostile and warlike Labour Council [TLC] and its pup invaded Capetown and prevented Capetown garment workers receiving upward of £25 000 in increased wages which their employers had made an Agreement with them to pay...

They say, "down with the Cape Federation of Trades".... because they want the job for themselves. Of course they say it because they want the Cape Unions to give up their own self-governing body, and change it for a set of tyrants whose hiding-hole is Johannesburg. "Comrades" they call themselves; Comrades, yes it does smell like the bloody revolutions of Europe, where the workers' blood washed the streets, and their bones rotted in the gutters....

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159. At 251, Ibid.

160. The same may be said of the outcome of *Ex Parte Petersen and 5 Others* op.cit.

161. *Smith v. Crawford and Others* N.O. (1936 C.P.D. 261), 24 January 1936.

162. See affidavit of Adv. T.H. Snitcher in *Smith v. Crawford and Others* N.O. CSC: Motions 2 (63) 1936 (C.A.D.).

The Cape Federation...does not pretend to shelter political revolutionary propaganda under its cloak of Trade Unionism. It is Trade Unionism and nothing else...

The type of worker the "Comrade Labour Council" gives its benign and empty blessing to, is one who remains in a Cape Union to lead it to destruction. That is the love they have for Cape Unions...they are doing their utmost to divide the workers and play the bosses' game. They are the true bosses' union, and have put many tens of thousands in the bosses' pockets. They care for the workers less than the bosses do.<sup>163</sup>

## 7 Help from Above

To put the matter in a nutshell, the employers are prepared to form an industrial council for the specific purpose of getting over the provisions of the wage determination and they are doing it with the connivance of the Minister of Labour and with the connivance and the assistance of his department.

- Duncan Burnside M.P., 1936<sup>164</sup>

The greatest injury suffered by the SAGWU organizing campaign was inflicted by the Department of Labour, which spiked the new wage determination and registered the industrial council.

In November 1935, the Minister announced that he did not intend to publish the final recommendations of the Wage Board as a determination.<sup>165</sup> Such a decision was unprecedented. The Minister often asked the Board to re-consider their recommendations in the light of objections received, but no minister had simply refused to gazette a recommendation of the Board as a determination. The reasons later given by the Department of Labour for this decision were that,

...it was considered the Wage Board's proposals would

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163. GWU-CP Pamphlet: 'Reply to S.A. Trades & Labour Council's (The Bosses' Union) attack issued 12th December, 1935.', December 1935 (GWUSA Archives).

164. Hansard 18 March 1936, col.1508.

165. Cape Argus 7 November 1935.

not be to the benefit of the bulk of employees and would operate detrimentally to the interests of the country as a whole.<sup>166</sup>

The Secretary for Labour, Ivan Walker, stated that the Wage Board reports had not contained "detailed information" on the financial position of the industry. The matter had been referred to the Board of Trade and Industries which reported that,

...the coastal manufacturers would not, under present conditions, be able to absorb the extra cost involved in the new Determination.<sup>167</sup>

The Wage Board had spent more than a year on an intensive investigation of the industry. Part of its brief under the Wage Act was to take account of an industry's ability to pay before it recommended wage increases. The Board had financial returns from most of the clothing factories<sup>168</sup> and had found the coastal manufacturers to be making large profits.<sup>169</sup> The CWCMA had itself seriously discussed 'voluntarily' including the full Wage Board proposals in their 'industrial council agreement'.<sup>170</sup> In view of these facts, the hasty opinion of the Board of Trade is open to question.

Hindsight allows a different interpretation of the refusal to gazette a new wage determination. Whatever their ability to pay, the manufacturers naturally resisted any legislative effort to increase wages. By 1935 the coastal clothing industry was solidly established as an important and growing sub-section of manufacturing industry. The Cape clothing manufacturers now had an economic influence they had lacked in 1925 and manufacturing industry as a whole was more strongly placed to discourage the government from upsetting its expansion. It is likely that the Minister listened more closely to the objections of the Cape manu-

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166. Department of Labour: Annual Report 1935 (UG 4 - 1937).

167. Quoted in *ibid*.

168. CWCMA Minutes: 25 March 1935 - M2/1.

169. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935 *op.cit*.

170. CWCMA Minutes: 19 July 1935 - M2/1.  
(See p.292, above.)

facturers for this reason.<sup>171</sup> In addition, the employment of 'civilized' labour in the Cape clothing industry was increasing steadily despite lower wage rates relative to the Transvaal.

Secondly, by the mid-1930's poor whiteness had ceased to be the burning political problem it had been (Davies, 1979, pp.260-1). Industrial expansion, born of the policy of tariff protection for industry, had shown itself to be the most effective way of providing jobs for whites. Wage determinations at 'civilized' levels, especially if they were enforced, threatened to hold back growth while not being productive of any compensating political advantages. The Wage Act was no longer needed to serve its original political purposes and so the economic implications of the Act were no longer tolerable to the government. By the mid-1930's, the government was preparing to change the functioning of the Wage Board and the functions of the Wage Act.<sup>172</sup> These changes found legislative expression only in 1937, when the Wage Act was amended to remove the duty of the Board to set 'civilized' wages. An earlier warning of the changes is seen in the fate of the 1935 Wage Board recommendations for the clothing industry.

The signing of the final report on the clothing industry coincided with the Minister's sacking of the whole Wage Board. F.A.W. Lucas had been chairman of the Board since its inception. In the past his tenure as head of the Board has been periodically

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171. Hostility to the principle of using the Wage Board to equalize wage rates in industry between the Cape and the Transvaal was shared generally by members of the CCI (CWCMA Minutes: 24 April 1935 - M2/1).

172. This general point is made by Davies (1979, pp.256, 264-5). His argument, while not in conflict with that suggested here, is different. Davies sees the Wage Act before "the early 'fusion' period" as a most important promoter of the 'civilized labour policy'. The changes in the Wage Act in 1937 are interpreted as part of "a restructuring of the apparatuses concerned with the assignment of white agents to wage-earning places in industry" (p.256). This role was taken over increasingly by the industrial councils (pp.264-5). In the case of the Cape clothing industry we have disputed the validity of Davies' generalizations about the direct role of the wage determinations in promoting white employment. (See Chapter 4, above).



renewed but when it lapsed in August 1935 he was not reappointed.<sup>173</sup> Neither were the other two members of the Board. Lucas had always seen the Wage Board as an instrument of social progress. It raised wages where employers made large profits out of unorganized workers and it tried to eliminate unfair competition between high and low wage regions. These aims were at odds with the political and economic objectives of the state once poor whiteness was no longer such a pressing political problem. The Minister had no appointees ready to take over the work of the Board which remained non-existent for six months before a new Board was named. The Wage Board was thus unable to protest the Minister's decision in November.<sup>174</sup>

The Transvaal garment workers' union and its Cape Town branch were extremely angry at this betrayal by the Minister. The Wage Board had been the pivot of the organizing campaign against the 'industrial council'. The Transvaal union and the SAGWU could justly claim some credit for having initiated the Wage Board investigation and having influenced the high wages recommended. The gazetting of the new determination would have further enhanced their prestige and greatly strengthened the national unity movement. The Transvaal union organized protest meetings and a march in Johannesburg<sup>175</sup> while in Cape Town, the SAGWU held a "Monster

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173. See Budlender (1979, p.138). Lucas was informed in April 1935 that he would not be reappointed (Cape Times 28 May 1936 (sic) cited by Budlender).

174. The Wage Board produced no annual report for 1935. See Department of Labour: Annual Report 1935 op.cit., pp.68, 72.

175. The refusal of the Minister to gazette a new wage determination was the context for this poem, later published in the Garment Worker:

#### LIED VAN DIE WERKELOSE

Fourie is ons Minister van Arbeid, ons sal niks ontbreek nie  
Hy laat ons neerlê, op harde park banke  
He lei ons na vry sop-huise  
Hy lei ons op die pad na verwoesting  
Vir sy Party se ontwil.

Ja, al gaan ons in 'n dal van skaduus van hongersnood  
Ons is gelukkig, want hy is teen ons.

Hy berei 'n besnoesing van ons lone  
In die teenwoordigheid van ons vyande.

Hy maak ons hoof swaar met boete  
Ons uitgawes oortref ons inkomste

Immers sal werkeloosheid en armoede ons volg  
In al die dae van die Verenigde Party se Administrasie  
en ons

Sal bly in pondokke  
Vir ewig en ewig.

(Klerewerker November 1936)

Demonstration" in the Drill Hall and a march to the Houses of Parliament. Pamphlets and press statements railed against the Minister for "breaking his promise" to publish the new determination and against the Department of Labour for its partiality to employers in administering the existing determination.<sup>176</sup> In addition, Sachs sought a court order to compel the Minister to gazette the recommendation.<sup>177</sup> F.A.W. Lucas, who had returned to the Bar after his dismissal as Wage Board chairman, appeared for the Transvaal union!<sup>178</sup>

But the demonstrations had no effect and the Supreme Court held that the Minister had full discretion on whether to publish a wage determination or not.<sup>179</sup> The SAGWU now threw all its efforts into sabotaging the 'industrial council' between the GWU-CP and the CWCMA.

Following the initial judgement against the Cape Union in *Smith v. Crawford and Others*, the SAGWU wrote to the CWCMA vainly offering to form an industrial council without the GWU-CP.<sup>180</sup> Sachs told Roytowski that he was prepared to take over the 'agreement' negotiated with the Cape Union.

He even said (Roytowski reported) that if the manufacturers' assisted in breaking up the Cape Garment Workers' Union, he would see that the employers got better terms than had been laid down in the Agreement.<sup>181</sup>

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This form of parody of the 23rd Psalm is not original. See Lasswell and Blumenstock (1939, p.95) "The Hobo's Prayer" and *Umteteli Wa Bantu* 29 October 1932 "'Civilized' Labour Policy", reprinted in Chapman (1981, p.142).

176. SAGWU Pamphlet advertising meeting on 14 November 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

177. *Cape Argus* 9 November 1935.

178. *Garment Workers' Union of the Transvaal v. A.P.J. Fourie N.O.* (GWUSA Archives, Bcc 1.6). Lucas had earlier given an opinion that the action had a good chance of success.

179. *Garment Workers' Union (Transvaal) v. Minister of Labour* (30 January 1936, TPD, 113); Department of Labour: Annual Report 1936, p.61 (UG 44 - 1937).

180. Mentioned in CWCMA Minutes: 26 November 1935 - M2/1. The letter referred to was dated 9 November 1935.

181. CWCMA Minutes: 7 November 1935 - M2/1. A draft letter from the SAGWU to Roytowski, dated 1 November 1935, read: "We have been stigmatized time and time again as 'revolutionaries' and

The manufacturers were disillusioned with the Cape Union but not to the extent that they could see any point in abandoning their 'industrial council'. They had participated in the ruses of the Cape Union to increase its membership and treated it as their ally in defeating the Transvaal union.

If it was unreasonable for the SAGWU to expect the CWCMA to change its attitude to the GWU-CP after the initial court judgement, the same cannot be said for the Department of Labour. The court case starkly exposed the corruption in the Cape Union. An impartial judge had said the officials were acting in bad faith. They flouted the constitution, they had no mandate from the workers to form an industrial council or negotiate an agreement with the employers. Evidence presented on the recruitment methods of the officials cast grave doubt on whether the Union was representative of workers in the industry, even though it claimed a membership of 2 700. None of these revelations had the least effect on the policy of the Department of Labour towards the Cape Union. The more the officials of the Department became aware of the dispute between the GWU-CP and the SAGWU, the more they seemed concerned to protect and promote the Cape Union and its Cape Federation union bosses. The partiality shown by the Department of Labour to the Cape Union was as blatant as it was decisive.<sup>182</sup>

When A.P. Fourie, the Minister of Labour, announced his refusal to gazette the wage determination, he said he was considering the draft agreement submitted to him by the industrial council "in the process of being formed" in Cape Town.<sup>183</sup> He knew then that the 'industrial council' had not been formed validly in terms of the Union's constitution.<sup>184</sup> The Department was uninterested

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'anti-conciliatories'....These descriptions are nothing but misleading. Our activities on the Witwatersrand in forming and participating very effectively in an Industrial Council, and a well administered industrial agreement, speak for themselves" (GWUSA Archives, Bbe 1.1.2). This draft was not sent.

182. The partiality had a 'bureaucratic' impetus which derived from the GWU-CP's status as a registered union, but more important, key officials actively sided with the GWU-CP against the SAGWU. The most obvious of these is R. Beattie, the Cape Town Divisional Inspector. Ivan Walker, the Secretary for Labour, was as important a supporter of the GWU-CP and its officials. He had a personal antipathy towards Sachs.

183. Cape Argus 7 November 1935.

184. Judgement in *Smith v. Crawford and Others* was on 21 October 1935.

in the undemocratic procedures at the general meeting. When it noticed flaws in every single resolution 'passed' at the meeting,<sup>185</sup> its response was to give the Cape Union (much needed)<sup>186</sup> advice and assistance on how it could clear its way to participate in a registered industrial council. The Department of Labour acted in full knowledge of the efforts of the SAGWU and the failings of the Cape Union officials. It assisted the GWU-CP and did its utmost to ignore the SAGWU.

The 'bureaucratic' reasons behind the stance of the Department was that the GWU-CP was registered and had more members on paper than the SAGWU.<sup>187</sup> The Registrar of Trade Unions was not moved by the outraged protests of the SAGWU at the press-ganged 'membership' of the Cape Union and the irregularities in the actions of its officials. He wrote to Weinberg rejecting the SAGWU application for registration,<sup>188</sup>

It is true that the judgement referred to by you indicates that the business of the registered union was conducted in an irregular manner, but this does not entitle me to disregard the fact that the body is a trade union within the meaning of the Act and that it has a large de facto membership.<sup>189</sup>

In view of all the deficiencies in the wording of the resolutions 'passed' at the Cape Union general meeting of 26 November, the Department of Labour wanted the Union to call another general

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185. Letter from Under Secretary of Labour to Divisional Inspector of Labour (DIL), Cape Town, 11 December 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

186. The Under Secretary of Labour wrote to the Divisional Inspector in Cape Town (ibid.): "A perusal of your [letter] of the 6th December would seem to indicate that members of the above Union [GWU-CP] have little idea of the action necessary to avoid legal difficulties at a later stage".

187. Memorandum from B.N. Wainwright, "C" Division, Department of Labour, Pretoria to the Registrar of Trade Union, 6 November 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/514.

188. The SAGWU applied for registration as early as August 1935 and complained then of the unconstitutional acts of GWU-CP officials (Letter from Weinberg to Registrar, 28 August 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/514).

189. Letter to SAGWU, 5 December 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/514. The letter continued: "In any case, the position of all members has now, I understand been regularized". This is a reference to the general meeting of the Cape Union on 26 November 1935.

meeting at which amendments to the constitution (drawn up by the Department) would be approved.<sup>190</sup>

Meanwhile the internal opponents of the Cape Union officials had petitioned for the calling of another general meeting. Its purpose was to rescind by majority vote all the resolutions carried at the last general meeting.<sup>191</sup> The Cape Union Executive acted swiftly. It suspended from membership all the sixty workers who had signed the petition. Then it called the meeting they requested – placing first on the agenda its own resolutions to amend the constitution,<sup>192</sup> and second a motion to expel from the Union the sixty petitioners. Last on the agenda was the resolution to "review and rescind" the resolution of the general meeting of 26 November. The agenda pamphlet explained to members:

If you allow a miserably small minority to obstruct your Union and keep you from the increases of wages already promised to you and only awaiting the Registration of your Wage Agreement, then you will deserve to lose the increases....Will you allow these 60 obstructionists to keep better wages out of the pockets of 3,000 to 4,000 garment workers?...

COME AND VOTE IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH AGAINST THIS WICKED RESOLUTION.<sup>193</sup>

The proposed amendments to the constitution would remove most of the powers of the general meeting of members under the existing constitution and place them in the hands of the Executive. This would allow the Executive to further amend the constitution at its leisure and without the further approval of a general meeting.

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190. Letter from Under Secretary for Labour to DIL, Cape Town, 11 December 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

191. GWU-CP Pamphlet: agenda and notice of general meeting on 9 January 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

192. Ibid. These were not the amendments advised by the Department of Labour in Pretoria but, it seems, by the GWU-CP lawyer. See letter from Under Secretary for Labour to DIL, Cape Town, 23 December 1935 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

193. GWU-CP Pamphlet: agenda and notice of general meeting on 9 January 1936 (GWUSA Archives). (Original emphasis).

The SAGWU was totally out-manoeuvred. Its leading supporters in the Cape Union could not attend the meeting and without their influence the meeting would probably go the way the Cape Union wished. The SAGWU issued a pamphlet to tell workers how to vote:

...The Evans-Poole-Freestone clique want you at this meeting -

a) To amend the Constitution in such a manner as to give them full control over the Union and to deprive you of any say in your own affairs. They want to tie you hand and foot. They want to do away with general meetings and place all power in the hands of a small coterie.

b) They want you to act as traitors and expel 60 workers whose only crime is that they dared to demand a general meeting.

They are not interested in your welfare but only in protecting the interests of the bosses.

Turn Messrs. Freestone, Evans and Poole out of your Union for they are enemies. Elect your own people whom you can trust to lead you, workers!

Vote for the rescinding of the resolutions of the general meeting of the 26<sup>th</sup> November, as that meeting was packed with bakers and lorry drivers and the garment workers were prevented from speaking by the hooligans of the clique.<sup>194</sup>

The meeting was held in the Trades Hall on 9 January 1936. It was even more disorderly than the previous general meeting. As Forward<sup>195</sup> reported the occasion, police were stationed outside

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194. 'Garment Workers of Cape Town - BEWARE!', n.d. (GWUSA Archives).

195. Forward 17 January 1936. This account is supported by the Cape Times 10 January 1936; Rose Kemp: 'Statement', 1945 op.cit.; Evidence of Rose Crawford to the Garment Workers' Union Commission of Inquiry, 1949, op.cit., pp.116-117, and an interview with Mrs. Rhoda Kets (nee Strichen).

the Hall to prevent suspended members from entering. The chairman (Poole) refused to put a motion to the meeting that they be allowed to attend.

Pandemonium then broke loose. In the confusion, despite the frantic efforts of Mr. Evans and his police escort, the suspended members trooped into the meeting and took their seats. It was at this stage that the chairman received some attention in the form of over-ripe tomatoes, the effects of which a woman worker tried to remove by pouring the contents of the chairman's water bottle over his head. Although it was a well-meaning gesture, the result was scarcely satisfactory to the chairman's appearance and temper...

Shortly afterwards, as the uproar continued, the meeting was closed.

...The chairman and secretary then left the platform and marched out of the hall followed by a crowd of excited, gesticulating and hostile workers...

The workers then reassembled in the hall and decided to conduct their own meeting. One of their number started to explain matters to a meeting which had, in the absence of the obnoxious officials, become suddenly quiet and orderly.

The venerable secretary of the Union was then seen to creep quietly into the corner of the hall in which the electric switches were located. Whenever the speaker made a pointed reference to the arbitrary behaviour of the union officials, including Mr. Evans, that gentleman switched the lights off. This, of course, drew yells of protest from the assembled workers, and the lights were then switched on. This undignified game went on for a time when the police were called in by the officials to clear the hall. The workers made a rush at the secretary who, like little Jack Horner, was still in his corner, but he disappeared with remarkable agility into the shelter of the Federation offices. Poole, the chairman, had long since made himself scarce.

The workers then assembled outside the hall to hold a meeting by moonlight...The meeting proceeded without further incident in perfect calm and after giving hearty boos for Messrs. Evans, Freestone and Poole, the workers quietly dispersed to their homes.

Twenty-five workers signed a letter to the Registrar which stated that as no discussion had been allowed the workers had refused to vote on the amendments to the constitution,

...but the Chairman nevertheless shouted out that the amendments had been carried and left the meeting together with the...other officials of the Union, without continuing with the rest of the agenda.<sup>196</sup>

Before this letter reached Pretoria, Poole and Evans hurriedly sent off the resolutions to Beattie with the request that he ask the Registrar,

...to be good enough to certify these amendments immediately on receipt, and wire you that he has done so, as the existence of this Union is in danger owing to the blocking motions adopted by the hostile and opposition Union governed by Messrs, Sachs and Weinberg.<sup>197</sup>

The Department of Labour was not known for its swift processing of constitutional amendments. But now the amendments were certified inside three days! This speed was still more remarkable because the Department was not happy with the procedure adopted in calling the meeting. Proper notice of the amendments had not been given and the exclusion of members without "authenticated" membership cards, as threatened in the notice of the meeting, was also unconstitutional.<sup>198</sup> But the Department was convinced of the need to make allowances for the "present difficulties"<sup>199</sup>

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196. Letter from 25 members of the GWU-CP to the Registrar, n.d., received 16 January 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

197. Letter from Poole (President, GWU-CP) and Evans (Hon. Secretary) to R. Beattie, DIL, Cape Town, 11 January 1936 (incorrectly dated 11 January 1935) S.A.B ARB1054/306.

198. Memorandum from B.N. Wainwright, "C" Division, Department of Labour to the Registrar, 14 January 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

199. Ibid.



of the Union. Beattie had impressed upon the Registrar the urgency of the situation. He wrote:

The position of this Union is very difficult. There is a small group of employees who belong to the S.A. Garment Workers' Union, who consistently attempt to smash up the meetings, being armed with whistles, etc. A further procedure is to submit under the existing Constitution requisitions for general meetings signed by at least twenty of these members, who in all number about forty. It seems that the line of attack is to exhaust the funds of the Union by calling upon them to hold repeated general meetings.<sup>200</sup>

The letter from the twenty five garment workers was received by the Registrar seven days after the meeting. They asked the Registrar,

...to refrain from registering (the amendments) until such time as the Union has held a proper meeting and allowance is given for discussion on the amendments.<sup>201</sup>

The Registrar replied that the amendments had already been certified.

In regard to the irregularities mentioned in the petition, this office was furnished with a certificate to the effect that the provisions of the Union's constitution were duly observed in connection with the adoption of the amendments.<sup>202</sup>

The Registrar may well have had such a certificate from Beattie, who attended the meeting<sup>203</sup> but he also possessed an internal memorandum that "the position was in fact not considered to be strictly in order"<sup>204</sup> and that the Divisional Inspector in Cape Town ought to "make it clear to the Union that there is some doubt

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200. Letter from Beattie, DIL, Cape Town to the Registrar, 10 January 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306. It is a moot point whether these statements are calculated lies. The quote is here intended merely to illustrate the partiality of certain officials towards the GWU-CP.

201. Letter from 25 members of GWU-CP...op.cit.

202. Letter from the Registrar to Rose Crawford, 17 January 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

203. Letter from Beattie to the Registrar, 10 January 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

204. Memorandum from Wainwright to the Under-Secretary for Labour, 4 May 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306. This memorandum reviews the documents in the file on the constitution of the GWU-CP.

attached to the legality of the procedure".<sup>205</sup> However, the Department was united in its decision to lend all its support to the GWU-CP in its battle with the rival union. In February 1936 the Industrial Council was finally registered.

In the following months the Department continued to disregard its own internal rules of procedure in order to push through a whole series of new amendments to the constitution. The intention and effect of these amendments was to protect the Union leadership from attack, whether from internal dissidents or a rival trade union.

Ivan Walker, the Secretary for Labour, noted that:

Under normal conditions the Department could reasonably insist upon the Union acting on the lines suggested.

[That amendments to the constitution be approved by a general meeting and not simply by the Executive - MN.]

There is however a very bitter fight in progress; the employees are of a type who know not loyalty and are without trade union tradition; the union officials too are singularly inept and appear to have no organizing ability and in the meantime the employees continue to receive wages lower than those the decent employers are willing to pay.<sup>206</sup>

By June 1936 the GWU-CP constitution still had not been finalised (although it was a party to the Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry, Cape which had been registered in February, and the agreement had been gazetted). A memorandum to the Registrar stated that:

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205. Memorandum from Wainwright to the Registrar, 14 January 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

206. Handwritten comment on memorandum from Wainwright, 5 February 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306. Many memoranda in this file register the irregularity of Departmental procedures tolerated in dealing with the GWU-CP constitution. In addition to those already cited and the two cited below (11 and 24 June 1936), see the letter from the Registrar to Divisional Inspector of Labour, Cape Town, 20 March 1936 and the memorandum from Wainwright to the Under Secretary for Labour, 4 May 1936.

In view of the difficulties of calling another general meeting of members (the rival Garment Workers' Union at Cape Town is still very active), the executive committee of the union...asks that the new Constitution be certified without the specific amendments suggested by the Department.<sup>207</sup>

The author of this memorandum earlier wrote:

I appreciate the difficulties of the Union's officials but it would not be doing the Union a good turn to certify the Constitution, especially as we hold certificates which go to shew that the proper procedure has not been followed.<sup>208</sup>

The Registrar did not concur. He certified the constitution, without it having been approved by a general meeting of members of the GWU-CP, on 26 June 1936.<sup>209</sup>

The Department of Labour's action in allowing the GWU-CP to form an industrial council<sup>210</sup> and allowing the union officials their undemocratic constitution had an enormous, probably decisive effect, on the fate of the SAGWU and the national unity campaign. The officials of the Department clearly hoped it would be a destructive effect.

## 8 Strike!

By February 1936, the SAGWU campaign was rapidly losing purpose and direction. It had recruited over 1 000 enthusiastic members, angry at the methods of the Cape Union officials and had even won the support of two members of the Cape Union's executive committee. But the situation had changed decisively over the preced-

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207. Memorandum to the Registrar, 24 June 1936 S.A.B ARB1054/306. (Author not clear).

208. Memorandum to the Secretary for Labour, 15 June 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

209. Undirected Memorandum, 'GWU-CP: Certification of Amended Constitution', dated 29 June 1936 S.A.B. ARB1054/306.

210. The Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Cape) - ICCI (Cape) - was registered on 24 February 1936 (Government Gazette 6 March 1936), the first Agreement was gazetted on 3 April 1936.

ing nine months. The GWU-CP now had a real existence. It had always been recognized by the employers and the Department of Labour. Now stop orders and worker fears of victimization allowed it to claim three times as many members as the SAGWU. The SAGWU's efforts to replace it as the registered recognized union had failed. The industrial council, despite all opposition, was in the final stage of formation<sup>211</sup> and the proposals of the Wage Board had been rejected by the Minister. It is understandable that the SAGWU now grasped at the straw of strike action, to advance their campaign "to a higher plane of real Trade Union activities."<sup>212</sup>

Early in 1936 King George V died. The government named 22 January a National Day of Mourning and labour inspectors saw to it that all factories closed for the day. Workers lost a day's pay. The SAGWU took up the issue. It called on all garment workers to appoint deputations to see their employers and to demand pay for Mourning Day.<sup>213</sup> Workers were warned to be prepared to go on strike and to protect members of the deputations against victimization.<sup>214</sup> Weinberg wrote to the CCI and the Department of Labour asking both to influence the clothing manufacturers to pay up and settle the grievance peacefully.<sup>215</sup> But he did say,

It is our intention not to rest until the demand of the workers' has been satisfied.

Several clothing factories had already paid a half-day's wage to their workers. Others paid over the following weeks after deputations had called on them. The SAGWU called lunch-hour meetings outside factories to encourage workers to approach their bosses. The issue was widely supported among the workers. The industry was in its slack period and, with short time being worked, wages

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211. The final application for registration was submitted on 10 February 1936 (Evidence of R. Beattie in Rex v. de Freitas, Fontaine & Weinberg CSC Criminal Appeals 2 (79) (1936 C.A.D.)).

212. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936.

213. SAGWU Pamphlet: 'A Day of Mourning Bulletin', 25 January 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

214. Forward 31 January 1936.

215. 'A Day of Mourning Bulletin' op.cit.

at the time were lower than usual. In addition, the public holiday came just after the factories had been closed for two to three weeks over Christmas and New Year. Workers received no pay at all for this period.

Not all factories agreed immediately to meet the demands of the deputations. At African Clothing, workers had to wait a week for the employer to make a decision in spite of their strike threat.<sup>216</sup> At H. Shames & Co., the owner refused to speak to the deputation. When the workers persisted with their demand he fired the leader of the deputation on the spot.<sup>217</sup> She was re-instated ten minutes after her fellow workers stopped work but a half-day's pay was deducted from the week's pay packets because of the stoppage. The next day 63 out of the 80 workers at H. Shames refused to enter the factory to begin work. Shames refused to speak to Weinberg who was at the factory advising the workers. He refused to speak to a worker deputation until all returned to work. Beattie, the labour inspector, then arrived. His presence had been urgently requested by the SAGWU on behalf of the workers. But he walked straight to the employer's office without consulting the workers. He was followed by Stuart and Evans, whose arrival was greeted by "an outburst of booing and shouting from the crowd of workers".<sup>218</sup> On emerging from Shames' office, Stuart and Evans tried to address the workers, but without success. After they left Shames met the deputation and "after a heated argument"<sup>219</sup> agreed to pay a full day's wages for 22 January, and also for time lost during the three hour strike. He also agreed not to victimize any strikers. The SAGWU hailed this "100% victory" as "the first successful Cape Town Clothing Workers' strike".

It has definitely exposed the reactionary elements confronting those workers who are making an attempt to

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216. 'A Day of Mourning Bulletin' op.cit.

217. The following account is based on reports in Forward 7 February 1936 and the Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. February 1936 - 'Cape Town's Unholy Alliance - Employers, Labour Department, Cape Federation and the Press' by Eli Weinberg.

218. Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. February 1936, p.9.

219. Ibid.

build their own free union. It has demonstrated clearly the courage and militant spirit existing among the workers of Cape Town.<sup>220</sup>

Inspired by this quick success, Weinberg did not hesitate, when the opportunity arose, to call a strike at the I.L. Back factory in Commercial Street. I.L. Back & Co. was one of the larger factories with about 150 workers. It was also "one of the more reputable employers".<sup>221</sup> This strike arose out of a deputation of workers demanding payment for Mourning Day. Back agreed to pay half a day's wages. The next morning he fired the leader of the deputation, Mrs. Maggie Alexander.<sup>222</sup>

The SAGWU wrote to Back asking him to reinstate Maggie Alexander and threatened to apply for a Conciliation Board if this was not done.<sup>223</sup> Supported by Bill Andrews, Duncan Burnside MP and several local unionists, Weinberg addressed a lunch time meeting outside the factory.<sup>224</sup> He advised the workers to come out on strike if Alexander was not immediately re-engaged.<sup>225</sup> She had stood up for her fellow workers and they should stand by her. Workers marched into the factory at 2 p.m. and demanded Alexander's reinstatement. Back refused. About half of the workers then walked out on strike. The strike lasted for seven weeks.<sup>226</sup>

From the start, the strike involved much wider issues than the victimization of Maggie Alexander. The struggle between the SAGWU and dissidents inside the GWU-CP on the one side, and employers, the Cape Union officials and the Labour Department on the other

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220. Trades & Labour Journal of S.A. February 1936, p.9.

221. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

222. SAGWU Pamphlet: 'Workers of Cape Town!', March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

223. SAGWU Pamphlet: 'To all workers employed at Messrs. I.L. Back!' (GWUSA Archives).

224. Ibid.

225. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

226. Forward printed regular articles on the strike. The SAGWU alleged that the Cape Times and Cape Argus complied with a request from the CCI to keep their coverage of SAGWU activities to a minimum.

was simply taking a new form. In a CWCMA meeting, Back denied that Alexander had been dismissed because she had led the deputation.

...(T)he facts were (said Back) that she had made herself a nuisance to the other employees by taking advantage of every opportunity that offered for advancing the claims of another organization.<sup>227</sup>

Weinberg saw immediately a still wider significance in the strike and prepared for "a lengthy stay out". He wrote:

It is absolutely essential that victory is scored by the workers of I.L. Back, since it will powerfully affect the whole of the trade union movement in the Cape.<sup>228</sup>

...(T)he employers very well realize that it is the death or life of the Cape Peninsula Garment Workers' Union which depends on this struggle.<sup>229</sup>

But from early on, the prospects of the I.L. Back workers winning the strike were bleak. Less than a half of the workforce remained out on strike and the factory continued working. The other clothing manufacturers, the Cape Union, the Labour Department and the police squarely supported Back. Despite the poor outlook, now that the SAGWU had no grip afforded to it for organizing by the industrial legislation, this strike became its main activity and perhaps its last chance of winning a permanent place amongst the Cape Town garment workers. If I.L. Back had been won, and had sparked off a series of successful strikes under the SAGWU banner, the rival union might have had a chance of displacing the Cape Union.

The strike at I.L. Back became a symbol first of the SAGWU-led opposition to the officials of the GWU-CP and soon of the conflict between the Transvaal and Cape labour movements. For these reasons, and specially because of the enthusiasm with which the issue was taken up by workers in Cape Town - garment workers

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227. CWCMA Minutes: 17 February 1936 - M2/1.

228. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

229. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

and non-garment workers alike - the strike dragged on for several weeks beyond its 'natural' term. Eli Weinberg recalled, in 1976, of his work in Cape Town in the 1930's,

All these activities were not just trade union activities. We turned every single issue, every single activity in the unions into a large-scale mass campaign. For instance, when we had a strike of 57 at I.L. Back & Co. we used to call meetings in support of that strike on the Grand Parade on Saturday afternoon and Sundays which were attended by 5 000 people and more. You know it was only 57 workers who were involved but it became a national issue in Cape Town...we raised every little issue onto the level of an important political issue.<sup>230</sup>

The strike was further used by the Transvaal garment workers' union and the TLC to focus nation-wide publicity on the evils of the Cape Garment Workers' Union and the Department of Labour and on the virtues of the national unity efforts of the Transvaal union. Sachs wrote:

The coastal workers want higher wages, as they cannot live on the miserable pittance which they receive at present. We have decided jointly, therefore, to fight to the bitter end

- a) for a National Union of Garment Workers,
- b) for the standard laid down by the Wage Board...

Our campaign will entail the printing of tens of thousands of pamphlets, several Supreme Court actions and hundreds of meetings...Accordingly we appeal to the entire trade union movement to come to our assistance.<sup>231</sup>

The Cornelius sisters, Joanna and Hester, came down from Johannesburg to lend their more than adequate experience to the picket lines.<sup>232</sup> Police were outside the factory every morning and con-

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230. Interview. See footnote 87, above.

231. Letter from Sachs (Garment Workers' Union, Transvaal) to NEC TLC, 11 February 1936 (TUCSA Archives Dc 8.26). See also NEC circular letter to unions, 13 February 1936 - SATLC Correspondence 1936 (TUCSA Archives).

232. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).



sistently harassed the pickets. Every lunch-hour, the SAGWU held meetings which were regularly attended by between two and three thousand workers from surrounding factories. The meetings were first held outside I.L. Back, but as the growing crowds obstructed the traffic, they were moved "to the big square at the top of Plein Street".<sup>233</sup> Evening meetings were held as well, the greatest of these being a meeting held on the Parade which attracted 10 000 people.<sup>234</sup>

The SAGWU was able (only with the generous help of the Transvaal union) to pay full wages to the strikers.<sup>235</sup> Apart from picketing activities and meetings, the union, one Sunday, arranged a picnic for the strikers and their parents and relatives on the beach opposite Sachs' holiday house at Clifton.<sup>236</sup>

Other garment workers were quick to show their support. One hundred workers at the New Model factory came out on strike for two days in solidarity with the I.L. Back workers.<sup>237</sup> Weinberg considered organizing one hour sympathy strikes in the "factories in which our influence is greater".<sup>238</sup> The SAGWU called on workers to refuse to do cutting or any other work for I.L. Back.<sup>239</sup>

The CFLU and the Cape Garment Workers' Union largely kept aloof from the strike. The GWU-CP hung up notices in all the factories stating that it had "no differences with any employer in Cape Town" although many of the strikers were members of the Union.<sup>240</sup> The Federation refused to see a deputation of the strikers and also to approve the SAGWU circularizing its affiliates to ask for financial assistance.

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233. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

234. This figure is given in Forward 28 February 1936 and in a letter from Weinberg to NEC TLC, 21 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

235. Letter from Weinberg to NEC TLC, 21 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

236. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

237. Forward 28 February 1936, 'Trade Union Movement in the Cape Wakes Up' by Eli Weinberg.

238. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936. It is not clear that this was taken up by any workers.

239. SAGWU Pamphlet: 'Workers of Cape Town!', March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

240. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936.

The regular meetings, the smouldering pamphlets and the daily meetings failed to draw out any more I.L. Back workers to join the strikers.<sup>241</sup> The police were outside the factory every day and frequently arrested picketers under the Riotous Assemblies Act. There were more than fifty prosecutions against strikers and their supporters.<sup>242</sup> The series of bail applications and court cases that this gave rise to seriously hampered the conduct of the strike. SAGWU leaders had to spend days in court, both as witnesses for the defence and as the accused. Much time was taken up briefing lawyers and raising money to pay bail and fines.<sup>243</sup>

The most publicized prosecution was under the Industrial Conciliation Act. Weinberg and eight others who had been at the lunch hour meeting which decided on the strike were charged with inciting an illegal strike.<sup>244</sup> The accused also included Bill Andrews, Adv. Harry Snitcher (the SAGWU legal adviser), and two Labour MP's as well as Jimmy Emmerich, the secretary of the CFLU-affiliated tramways union.<sup>245</sup> The issue of summons was protested at a massive meeting called by the CDC on the Parade. Ten thousand people came. After the meeting 2 000 joined a march through Cape Town, past the I.L. Back factory and Parliament, to the Trades Hall in Corporation Street.<sup>246</sup> There, reported Weinberg,

...a further meeting was held and fierce attacks were launched upon the Cape Federation of Labour Unions.<sup>247</sup>

The magistrate found Weinberg, the SAGWU president, Jimmy Fortune, and the union organizer, Rosie de Freitas, guilty of inciting

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241. Evidence heard in a case in the Magistrate's Court on 21 February suggested that two thirds of the workers were not on strike but working (Rex v. de Freitas and 2 Others op.cit.). Weinberg, in his report at the end of the strike, put the fraction at about a half. ('Strike at I.L. Back & Co. Capetown. Full Report' c. April 1936 - GWUSA Archives).

242. Weinberg, '...Full Report' op.cit.

243. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

244. Rex v. Burnside and 8 Others, Cape Town Magistrate's Court, 21 February 1936 and 18 March 1936 (judgement) (GWUSA Archives).

245. CDC Pamphlet advertising a 'Monster Protest Meeting' on 20 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

246. Forward 28 February 1936.

247. Letter from Weinberg to NEC TLC, 21 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

an illegal strike.<sup>248</sup> They were each fined. The other accused were dismissed. The main witness for the state in the case was Beattie, who had listened to the speeches from inside the I.L. Back factory while standing on a chair beside a window.<sup>249</sup>

Although successful meetings were held right through March, police harassment of picketers increased, with obvious effects on the morale of the strikers. At one stage police were in the habit of arresting everyone outside the factory. On one morning twenty-two women workers were arrested and charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act.<sup>250</sup>

Hester Cornelius wrote a letter to a friend in Johannesburg:

It is very quiet here, we are not allowed to stand picket any more; all we can do is holding meetings at various factories; and there we also have police; a few times they tried to stop us, but we took no notice of them, we carried on, and opposed them as much as we can.

I suppose you heard about the wholesale arrest here. That was our best picket. 22 strikers were arrested for doing nothing. They marched us off to the charge office, and lock us up, but what a row we kicked up.

It was early in the morning, before we had our Coffee; so we all shouted together: „We want Coffee", we kept on for a few minutes, until they promised us coffee;

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248. The judgement was upheld on appeal to the Supreme Court. There being no registered industrial council at the time, the strike was illegal until the Minister had refused to appoint a Conciliation Board (Rex v. de Freitas and 2 Others (1936 CPD 413) decided on 29 June 1936). The Minister advised the SAGWU of his refusal to appoint a Board only a month after the strike began (letter from Weinberg to the Secretary for Labour, 9 March 1936 - TUCSA Archives, Dc 8.26).

249. Burnside in Hansard 18 March 1936, column 1511.

250. Weinberg '...Full Report' op.cit.; Forward 10 March 1936; Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 March 1936. The workers were fined £3 each. Weinberg wrote a play, 'The Trial of the 22' (GWUSA Archives) about the incident. It was performed locally (with Morris Kagan acting the part of the judge) and in Johannesburg. Drama was a favourite medium of the Transvaal union for educating workers.

then we shouted for bread. After a while, we started singing songs: „There's a bobby round the corner", Oh speak to me scabby" and "the red flag". The people gathered outside in a mass to listen to our songs; They took us away to the cells underground, but what a time we had! The cell was 12 feet by 12, and we were 17 in one ~~cell~~ cell. The non-European strikers were in another cell. We started kicking and shouting, „We want all our Comrades together". They begged us to 'keep Quiet, but without success. They brought the other Comrades to us, and gave us a bigger cell. So we started singing and dancing. The matron was very nice, but we were very cheeky and so she started crying and that was fun to us. They put us in a long corridor, where we could see all the other prisoners; so we started having speeches; to unite, all the workers of South Africa. When there were no prisoners to listen we addressed our meeting to the police. 4 o'clock in the afternoon they released us; but our case is remanded untill Thursday. Nearly every day the court is packed with strikers with red bows.

The scabs will never forget us; they got hidings of their lifes. Now and then you heard about a new arrest made of strikers assaulted nonstrikers. I was arrested 3 times; but I expect another one. This morning, two policemen walked up in plain street; and did not make way for me; I stopped in front of them; and they stopped too. They wanted me to give way, and be damned if I would. I walked in them and shouldered the one nearly off the pavement and walked on. Oh, I hate these fools.<sup>251</sup>

The SAGWU constantly made efforts to settle the strike. The workers were not in a strong bargaining position but it was several weeks before the SAGWU was prepared to accept the humiliating settlement that finally ended the strike. The local Labour Department gave no assistance to the SAGWU in negotiating an early end to the

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251. Letter from Hester Cornelius to Miss Maudlen, n.d. (GWUSA Archives).

strike.<sup>252</sup> The officials were concerned more with their prosecution of the leaders under the Industrial Conciliation Act. The SAGWU rejected a proposal by I.L. Back that the dispute be submitted to an 'independent' committee of enquiry consisting of Beattie and representatives from the CCI and the GWU-CP.<sup>253</sup> The strikers accepted a suggestion of Ivan Walker that the committee consist of a magistrate and two social workers and that workers return to work, assured of no victimization, until the committee decided on the position of Maggie Alexander. Back refused to consider this.<sup>254</sup> On 7 March, the Minister informed the SAGWU that he refused to appoint a Conciliation Board as the ICCI (Cape) had never been registered. He wanted the dispute to be settled by the industrial council!<sup>255</sup> Weinberg replied:

...(A)ny Council that may have been formed has not been formed with the consent of the workers in the Clothing Industry in the Cape, nor even with the consent of the membership of the...registered Union in the Cape.<sup>256</sup>

He said that the workers would not "submit their case to a body which is hostile to their interest".<sup>257</sup> To the TLC he wrote,

...(W)hilst we are prepared to consider every possible manner of settling the strike, the course suggested by the Department of Labour will not only mean a humiliation of the workers, but would mean the defeat of the very principle of free trade unions.<sup>258</sup>

Three thousand workers thronged the Parade in support of the refusal to submit the dispute to the Industrial Council.<sup>259</sup> A thousand

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252. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 14 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

253. Weinberg, '...Full Report' op.cit.

254. Letter from Weinberg to NEC TLC, 21 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

255. Letter from Weinberg to the Secretary for Labour, 9 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

256. Ibid.

257. Ibid.

258. Letter from Weinberg to the General Secretary, TLC, 9 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

259. Forward 13 March 1936.

workers joined a procession which marched to the I.L. Back factory with banners reading "Down with Fourie" (the Minister of Labour) and "For Free Trade Unions". At the factory there were scuffles with the police, stones were thrown at the factory windows and seven people were arrested.<sup>260</sup>

For a period such worker enthusiasm had obscured the poor prospects for the strike itself. This was specially the case because these widely-supported solidarity marches and meetings were a new phenomenon on the sleepy Cape Town labour scene. But after four weeks of the strike, on the very day of this great demonstration, Weinberg wrote a dejected letter to Sachs.<sup>261</sup>

I must admit with bitter regret that I have made a mess of this strike. I have made a number of bitter mistakes, for which I must now pay. The strike is not finished yet and we can still give the employer a lot of trouble, but it is more or less certain that we are losing. I am deeply worried over this, but I suppose defeats are part and parcel of this struggle. We shall certainly stand up again.

The strike was called off at the end of March. A.G. Forsyth, secretary of the TLC, and Morris Kentridge MP arranged a settlement after talks with the CWCMA and the Department of Labour. It was a humiliating defeat for the SAGWU. The CWCMA found jobs for forty strikers and agreed to reabsorb the remaining fifteen or so when places became available. In return for the employers agreeing to re-employ the workers, the SAGWU had to sign a statement that,

During the progress of the dispute many inaccurate charges were made against the employers. These the officials of the Union have unreservedly withdrawn.<sup>262</sup>

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260. Forward 13 March 1936.

261. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 March 1936. This is a personal letter (beginning 'Dear Solly') differing in style from his other letters to Sachs (which begin 'Dear Comrade').

262. Quoted in Weinberg '...Full Report' op.cit. It was not made clear to the SAGWU which statements were referred to. They signed the agreement under protest on account of these two sentences.

The strikers had not achieved their immediate objective, but the strike did have a positive content to it. Weinberg wrote:

The workers thus returned to work after having put up a splendid and glorious fight. They have gone through a school of solidarity and unity which has been a shining example to many workers in the Cape.<sup>263</sup>

The activities surrounding the dispute gave a notable impetus to new organization among the workers of Cape Town. The membership of existing unions (including that of the SAGWU) increased during the strike. Weinberg wrote to the TLC:

These powerful mass meetings together with other forms of publicity have so aroused the workers of Cape Town that a fertile soil has been created for the building up of organizations in the various industries. Our office is flooded with deputation after deputation from workers, not only from the Clothing Industry, but from the tobacco factories, leather factories and other industries. It is to be hoped that this splendid spirit will be well utilised by the Trade Union Unity Conference with a view to bringing about unity and to intensify organizing activities among the unorganized or loosely organized workers of the Cape.<sup>264</sup>

## 9 A Change in Strategy

We shall not hesitate to adopt any tactics, fair or foul, in dealing with a bunch of unmitigated scoundrels who thrive solely on the poverty and misery of the workers.

- Solly Sachs, 1936<sup>265</sup>

For Eli Weinberg, the strike at I.L. Back & Co. raised questions about the suitability of the strategy of the SAGWU for victory in the campaign to organize the garment workers of Cape Town and draw them into a national union. As originally conceived in 1935, the strategy was to organize workers into the SAGWU - if necessary

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263. Weinberg, '...Full Report' op.cit.

264. Letter from Weinberg to NEC TLC, 21 February 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

265. Letter from Sachs to Rose Crawford, 19 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

by pulling them away from the GWU-CP, to upset the formation of an industrial council including the Cape Union (using legal means and disrupters inside the Cape Union) and to get the Minister to gazette a new wage determination. The strategy was to break up the Cape Union and replace it with the rival union. It had suffered severe setbacks with the growth of the membership of the GWU-CP, the refusal to gazette the determination and finally with the registration of the industrial council. The situation had changed significantly. Weinberg wrote to Sachs, tentatively suggesting a total change in the strategy to capture the Cape.

The establishment of the Industrial Council has placed us before a great difficulty. We could, of course, still attempt to upset it and obtain a temporary interdict against them. But in the long run it seems to me that we shall not be able to stop it...the Minister of Labour is determined to have it his way. The biggest difficulty of all is, however, the fact that the workers can benefit immediately from an increase in wages, if the Industrial Council is established and their agreement registered. We have nothing to offer against that... I have thought here, that we might change our whole front over to an internal oppositionary fight for leadership in the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula, and that we allow them to establish their Industrial Council....

I am leaving it to your better judgement and experience to advise us in this.<sup>266</sup>

By the time the SAGWU had celebrated its first anniversary in May 1936, the new policy had been adopted. There were no more legal attacks on the Cape Union or on the industrial council as workers were exhorted to build up their own strength within the Cape Union:

We have to fight for democracy in the registered Union, in order to enable the workers to chuck the treacherous leadership and to elect their own officials and Committee. We have to carry on the fight for higher wages and better conditions.

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266. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 10 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).



In order to be able to carry on this fight we must train and teach workers to become leaders in the factories...

We have to fight for the right of the garment workers to control their affairs independent of the Bosses....<sup>267</sup>

A later pamphlet stated:

It is not enough to pay membership dues to a Union. You must learn to become active members of the Union, to control the destiny and affairs of your organization. You must select for positions not those who talk big, but those who by their everyday activity show you, that they are fighters on your behalf and that they take up your demands.

You must build your organization on the basis of control by the rank and file so that in future you should be able to prevent any further wage cuts.<sup>268</sup>

The SAGWU continued to exist. Its membership reached a peak of 1 300 in May 1936. But its task was now to give a lead to workers to organize themselves strongly in the factories and to use this power to win influence inside the Cape Union. The SAGWU advised workers on how to take forward complaints and urged the need "to force the bosses to observe their own agreement and carry it out".<sup>269</sup>

#### 10 Turncoats and Trotskyists - Early Internal Opposition to the Union Bureaucrats

Opposition to Stuart, Evans and company had never been the exclusive preserve of the SAGWU and its members. Many workers reacted against the dictatorial and undemocratic methods of the Federation as soon as it began to revive the GWU-CP. At least two loose opposition groups had grown up inside the Cape Union around these workers. The one group, led by Rose Crawford, allied itself with the SAGWU campaign during 1935, while the other, in which David

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267. The South African Garment Worker 1 (1) May 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

268. SAGWU Pamphlet: 'Another Wage Cut for Garment Workers', October 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

269. The South Africa Garment Worker 1 (1) May 1936.

Lunn was the key figure, first opposed the SAGWU.

Rose Crawford became a most important leader of the Cape Union – if not quite in the manner the SAGWU would have hoped. When she retired in 1956 she was general secretary of the Union, after twenty years' service as a paid Union official. Crawford had entered the clothing industry in 1908<sup>270</sup> at the age of nineteen.<sup>271</sup> In 1935 she worked at M. Bertish & Co. She had been a member of the special executive committee of the Union since 1928 but stated that, in 1928,

...after the wage determination became law the meetings fell off in attendance and few turned up. They were not interested any more.<sup>272</sup>

Evans was a friend of hers, but in 1935 she "had a fallout with the officials of the Union", including Evans.<sup>273</sup> Rhoda Kets, a fellow worker and later an organizer for the Cape Union, stated in an interview that the disagreement arose partly over the position Poole held in the Union:

We worked for Mr. Poole. He was the manager in the cutting room. And you can't have a man serving two masters. And that was the first time I wrote a letter to demand a public hearing of this.<sup>274</sup>

Workers also wanted to know by what right Evans and Freestone served as secretaries<sup>275</sup> of the Union. They had never been

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270. Evidence of Rose Crawford: Garment Workers' Union Commission of Inquiry: Minutes of Evidence, 1949 op.cit., p.120.

271. Letter from R.C. Kets to the Africana Museum, Johannesburg, 30 May 1976. (Despite their historical interest, letters accompanying photographs and documents Mrs. Kets sent to this Museum are kept as 'business letters' and are not part of the Africana Library or the Africana Museum collection itself. I am indebted to Mrs. E. Ritchie for showing me the correspondence between the Museum and Mrs. Kets).

272. Evidence of Rose Crawford op.cit., p.116.

273. Ibid.

274. Interview with Mrs. Rhoda Kets (nee Strichen), 8 April 1981. The SAGWU made great propaganda out of Poole being a manager and not a worker. See CDC Pamphlet: 'To all Trade Unions...' December 1935 op.cit.

275. Evans signed himself as the "Honorary Secretary" and Freestone as the "General Secretary". Freestone was an employee of the Union from 1 June 1935 at a salary of £20 per month. The Constitution made no provision for two secretaries.

elected.<sup>276</sup> Crawford responded to the dissatisfaction of her fellow workers and "wrote out a letter of no confidence".<sup>277</sup> Weinberg found out about Crawford's opposition to the Union officials and introduced her to Sachs. Sachs told Crawford of the illegality of all the actions of the officials and gained her co-operation in the efforts the SAGWU was making inside the Cape Union to stop the formation of an industrial council.<sup>278</sup> Crawford vigorously challenged the actions of the officials at a union meeting on 20 November 1935 and she was one of those suspended from Union membership prior to the requisitioned general meeting.<sup>279</sup>

Crawford never joined the SAGWU, but remained one of the chief internal organizers against the officials. She was again suspended, with a larger group of supporters, before the requisitioned general meeting in January 1936. She was the principal signatory to the petition which (too late) asked the Department of Labour not to register the undemocratic amendments to the constitution. In March, Hester and Joanna Cornelius stayed in her house. Crawford wrote a fighting letter to Sachs about new Cape efforts to defeat the SAGWU:

Personally I would rather fight like hell, than crawl back to the Trades Hall and if it comes to the worst leave the job. But what about the rank and file... Comrade Weinberg is putting up a wonderful fight, but what can a handful of workers do when it is not only the boss you are fighting but the whole capitalistic state behind him as well as the traitor union.<sup>280</sup>

Despite further references in this letter to "Mussolini Evans", only a few weeks later Crawford accepted an offer from Evans to fill the post of a paid organizer of the Cape Union! She recalled:

Mr. Evans came to see me and spoke nicely to me and I

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276. See Affidavit of Rhoda Strichen (Smith v. Crawford and Others op.cit.).

277. Evidence of Rose Crawford op.cit., p.116.

278. Ibid.

279. Ex Parte Ernest Petersen and 5 Others op.cit.

280. Letter from Crawford to Sachs, 8 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

agreed to become an organizer, after consulting the workers, as from the 1st May 1936. I have been faithful towards the Cape Union ever since then.<sup>281</sup>

Rhoda Kets switched allegiance at the same time.<sup>282</sup> Officials of both the GWU-CP and the CWCMA gave evidence against Sachs and the Transvaal union to the commission of inquiry appointed by the Nationalist government in 1948 as part of its attack on the Transvaal Union. Crawford was cross-examined by Sachs about the second Cape campaign. She responded:

Since the formation of the industrial council in 1935, we did improve our conditions. We had been dead but you woke us up, but after we had life again we did not want your interference.<sup>283</sup>

In the first phase of the SAGWU campaign, when it was trying to destroy the Cape Union, Crawford was a useful ally. Once she had defected and the campaign changed course, in an attempt to capture the Cape Union from the inside, the SAGWU made contact with David Lunn. As mentioned earlier (p.277) Lunn opposed the formation of a rival union in the Cape garment industry from the start. He had organized many workers in his own factory and began to work inside the Cape Union structure. He believed that the priority was to get a registered industrial council. This would involve stop order subscriptions and open the way to a "professional" rather than an "amateur" union. Workers would get the benefit of an immediate wage increase and could then be mobilized to depose the Evanses and Stuarts.<sup>284</sup>

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281. Evidence of Rose Crawford op.cit., p.118.

282. Her new membership card, No.4401, was dated 15 May 1936 (Africana Museum).

283. Minutes of Evidence op.cit., p.143.

284. Interview with David Lunn, 4 January 1980.

Eli Weinberg clashed with Lunn at a meeting "in the hall of the Lenin Club" on 22 May 1935. Weinberg reported:

"Mr. Lunn told the workers, that they need not fear the Federation leaders. They would succeed to push them out, before the Industrial Council was set up and that then they could send representatives of their own to the Council. I warned the workers of the lack of Democracy in the Bosses' Union and told them that

Lunn first attended Union meetings as a shop steward from African Clothing. The executive committee appointed him to be a Union representative on the 'industrial council' and he became its vice-chairman in July 1935.<sup>285</sup> He urged the executive committee and the shop stewards, in a joint meeting, not to accept the proposed agreement of the employers but to push for the full Wage Board proposals to be taken over by the industrial council. His resolution was defeated in a vote.<sup>286</sup> Lunn also pressed Stuart and Evans to convene general meetings. Both continually refused on the pretext that there was no hall large enough to accommodate all the members.<sup>287</sup>

At this time, Lunn was a member of the Communist League of South Africa, an offshoot of the Trotskyist "Lenin Club" which had been formed in Cape Town in 1932.<sup>288</sup> The majority of the Lenin Club were shopkeepers, teachers and small businessmen. It arranged public meetings, education classes for workers,<sup>289</sup> and published a newsletter called Workers' Voice. It held regular outdoor meetings at lunch times outside the old Post Office at the bottom of Adderley Street.

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they would never succeed in breaking the influence of the employers in the Cape Garment Workers' Union". (Letter to Sachs, 24 May 1935 - GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4.1). This prophecy proved only too true.

- 285. ICCI (Cape) Minutes: 24 July 1935 (Annexure K - Smith v. Crawford op.cit.).
- 286. GWU-CP Minutes: 8 August 1935 - joint executive and shop stewards' meeting (Annexure F - Smith v. Crawford op.cit.).
- 287. David Lunn, 'Statement', 1945 op.cit.
- 288. Hear the tape-recorded interview of Charles van Gelderen (SOAS Library). See Southall (1980); Hirson (1982); Lenin Club 'Manifesto': 'Workers of South Africa, Awake!', 1934 (SAIRR Reference Library). I conducted interviews with three former members of the Lenin Club, David Lunn, Herman van Gelderen and Eileen Ventris. Also see the remarkable letters of Clare Goodlatte (S.A. Library MSB618).
- 289. A literacy class in Langa started off with Anti-Dühring! (Interview). See Forward 29 November 1935 on the 'study circle' of garment workers supervised by the Lenin Club. Andrews accused the Lenin Club of hampering the activities of the SAGWU in its fight with the Federation because it diverted workers from attending important SAGWU meetings.

As an organization, the Lenin Club did not involve itself in organizing workers or forming trade unions, but a few of its members were active in unions and fell under its discipline. In October 1935, as the SAGWU was trying to build up a rival union to the GWU-CP, the Lenin Club advised an opposite course:

The split must be healed. The Cape Garment Workers' Union must be regenerated by the entry of those militant Trade Unionists who are at present in the S.A. Garment Workers' Union. There is no other way. Even if the best elements in the Cape Union were to leave and join the S.A. Garment Workers' Union, most of the workers would be left behind at the mercy of Messrs. Stuart and Evans. THE MESS MUST BE CLEANED UP FROM WITHIN.<sup>290</sup>

As the GWU-CP was the registered and recognized garment workers' union, with a membership of thousands as against the mere hundreds of the SAGWU,

...the proper place for militant, class-conscious workers was in the union with a mass membership, and not in a separate union which would only tend to divide and confuse the broad masses of the workers.<sup>291</sup>

In January 1935, the Lenin Club changed its line on the garment workers' struggle. It was appalled by Evans and Freestone signing an industrial council agreement with wages lower than those advised by the Wage Board and also by "their policy of sheer hooliganism, of expulsion of militants".<sup>292</sup>

Workers' Voice stated:

Obviously a Trade Union which employs policemen as thugs to eject its own members from meetings is no place for a class-conscious worker. Such a Union must be smashed and its leaders driven out of the labour movement!...

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290. Workers' Voice October 1935. (Original emphasis)

291. Workers' Voice February 1936. This is a statement of the previous year's policy.

292. Ibid.

Another organization is necessary which the workers can enter and which will organize the struggle for the betterment of working class conditions...

Our policy then, is that the present members of the C.G.W.U. should resign en bloc and enter the S.A.G.W.U.<sup>293</sup>

David Lunn was expelled from the Lenin Club and the Communist League,

...because he failed to conduct himself in the manner expected from a Bolshevik-Leninist in the Trade Union Movement.<sup>294</sup>

The Lenin Club executive explained:

...(W)e relied upon David Lunn to give the militants the lead in the struggle against the bureaucrats... Instead of leading the fight against Evans and Freestone, Lunn has lent tacit support to their policy of treachery and betrayal.

At the general meeting he was on the platform whilst militant oppositionists were ejected from the Hall by police thugs. He uttered not one word of protest...He raised no protest against the expulsions of leading militants, including workers in his own factory.<sup>295</sup>

Lunn had already compromised himself in the eyes of many workers on account of his collaboration with the Union officials. He wrote later:

The masses of workers were dead against Stuart, Evans and Freestone because they were not members of the trade and (because) the workers looked upon them as bosses' men....

Even I was treated with a certain amount of suspicion by the workers because of my association with Stuart, Evans and Freestone.<sup>296</sup>

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293. Workers' Voice February 1936.

294. Ibid.

295. Workers' Voice January 1936.

296. 'Statement', 1945 op.cit., paragraphs 29, 30.

But, to an extent, it was a choice between collaboration or expulsion. Lunn was not prepared, at the behest of the Lenin Club or anyone else, to abandon the advantages he had gained inside the Union structures by means of his acquiescence with some of the clique methods. He still felt that the Union could be captured from within. An additional reason for his rejection of the directive from the Lenin Club was that he refused to subordinate himself to Solly Sachs, as the Club's line in fact required. Lunn was suspicious of Sachs' past record in Cape Town as well as his present motives.<sup>297</sup>

By April 1936, Poole had become the first agent of the ICCI (Cape). David Lunn was elected chairman of the Cape Union in his stead. He did not control the Union, as we shall see, but he occupied a position in which he could be of great use in the worker based challenge to the bureaucrats, being prepared by Weinberg and the SAGWU.

The Lenin Club had no further influence on the garment workers' struggle. It had no base in the working class in Cape Town. It mattered little to whom it gave 'support'. But its policy in the garment industry, uncannily always the exact opposite of the SAGWU strategy, exposes one of the roots of Western Cape Trotskyism.

#### 11 Inside the Bosses' Union

The ruling group in the Cape Garment Workers' Union decisively won the first round of the battle against the rival union and its Transvaal backers. In April 1936 the industrial council agreement was gazetted and the wages of many workers rose. The Department of Labour registered the ICCI (Cape) and legalized the agreement despite the fact that the Union's constitution had not been approved (either by the Department or by the members of the Union). The Department connived at the irregular and undemocratic actions of the ruling group with whom certain officials (in particular Richard Beattie and Ivan Walker) had an understanding.<sup>298</sup>

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297. Interviews with David Lunn, February 1978; July 1978; January 1980.

298. Forward (20 March 1936) reported that, in the appeal against the conviction of the three SAGWU leaders under the Industrial Conciliation Act, their lawyer, "Mr. Snitcher, said that from his investigations he believed a 'racket' existed in the garment industry between certain employers, certain trade union leaders and certain highly placed government officials".



The new constitution, finally certified in June 1936, was remarkably undemocratic. Weinberg described it as being,

...nothing short of the constitution of any of the fascist corporate unions in Italy or Germany.<sup>299</sup>

Power was concentrated in the hands of the executive committee. This was elected annually by vote of the Union's shop stewards (called Delegates in this context). The executive appointed the general secretary and had the power to expel a Union member even if a delegates' meeting advised against this. No provision was made for general meetings of the Union members. The only means by which the membership could directly influence the executive was by ballot. A requisition for a ballot required the signatures of at least two hundred members.<sup>300</sup>

The aim of the SAGWU was to secure the election of its supporters as shop stewards in the factories and then to use control of the delegates' meeting to capture the executive. As this was likely to take some time, the SAGWU also tried to put pressure on the existing executive committee to make the constitution a little more open to participation from members. The executive could, of course, amend the constitution without reference to the delegates or the membership. In April 1936, Sachs, Weinberg and Forsyth met with Ivan Walker, the Secretary for Labour, to discuss some form of truce in the Cape garment industry dispute. They agreed that the SAGWU and the Transvaal union would not take any action, legal or otherwise, to upset the existence of the ICCI (Cape) or the agreement. In return, the Labour Department undertook not to publish any further agreements unless it was satisfied the Union constitution had been complied with and workers had been consulted. Walker also promised to speed up the registration of any amendments to the constitution "which would aim at

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299. SAGWU Memorandum to the NEC of the TLC: 'The Position of the Clothing Industry in the Cape, with particular reference to the dictatorial methods adopted by certain officials of the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula', n.d. c. January 1937, p.3. (signed by Weinberg - hereinafter Weinberg, 'The Position...') (GWUSA Archives).

300. Ibid. In the face of dissident attacks during the 1940's this was raised to 400 signatures, not more than 100 of which were to come from any one factory (GWU-CP Constitution 1952 - GWUSA Archives).

the extension of democratic rights of the members of the Union".<sup>301</sup>

Walker broke the agreement in both its aspects. We have already seen how the Department pushed through the certification of the GWU-CP constitution in June, despite the fact that its advisers favoured the changes being confirmed by a general meeting of the Union.<sup>302</sup> In October, an amendment to the industrial council agreement was gazetted which set the wages of some grades of workers even below those of the old wage determination.<sup>303</sup> The Department of Labour was no more sympathetic to opponents of Evans and company working inside the Union than it was to a rival union.

Even in the face of these further setbacks, the effort to organize inside the Cape Union made notable progress. The SAGWU arranged a 'Conference of Activists' in August at which the need was stressed to train more activists "to assist in the fight for unity".<sup>304</sup> SAGWU evening meetings included factory representatives and shop stewards of the Cape Union.<sup>305</sup> During the day, Weinberg and other activists held meetings at the factories. At the end of December 1936, Weinberg stated at a planning meeting which reviewed the progress of the campaign:

...It would be possible before long to capture leadership in the Union because the mass of the workers were

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301. Weinberg, 'The Position...' op.cit.

302. Walker was the superior of the Registrar of Trade Unions. The file ARB1054/306 strongly suggests Walker personally decided that the Department should risk the consequences of registering the constitution despite its internal deficiencies and the irregularities surrounding its drafting. On 15 June 1936 he wrote: "If the Union is prepared to accept full responsibility (sic) and the Registrar is able to say that the[draft amended Constitution] conforms to the law, it should be registered". (Handwritten note on memorandum to the Secretary for Labour 15 June 1936). The Registrar was advised the constitution did not conform to the law (Memorandum to the Registrar, 24 June 1936, paragraph 8). Nevertheless, the constitution was certified as it stood. (See pp. 315/6, above).

303. Weinberg, 'The Position...' op.cit.; SAGWU Pamphlet: 'Another Wage Cut for Garment Workers' October 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

304. SAGWU Minutes: 17 August 1936 (Conference of activists and factory representatives) (GWUSA Archives).

305. Ibid.; SAGWU Minutes: 25 March 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

definitely in favour of the policy of the S.A.G.W.U.<sup>306</sup>

His remarks were supported by J.V. Mussell, the vice-chairman of the Cape Union who was also a member of the SAGWU. Mussell said:

...from his own observations he also thought that it would not be very long now before the Union would be captured. It all depended on whether the constitution would be amended.<sup>307</sup>

These amendments, put forward by Cape executive committee members who were opposed to the "reactionary leaders", would restore some power to the general meeting of members. Sachs was not so optimistic. He,

...pointed out that even with all the work done so far - and he was not underestimating its importance - Evans was still the Union and did what he liked. He thought this would be so for quite a time to come.<sup>308</sup>

The Stuart Machine extended a dominating control over the Cape Union whoever was on the executive committee and whoever was the chairman. David Lunn, chairman from 1936 to 1937, wrote later:

...during that period Evans made it abundantly clear that on all questions of importance, Stuart was boss. Stuart told us in my presence, on several occasions, that he had signed an agreement with the old committee, appointing him as secretary for two or three years, and that there was a clause in the agreement that he could appoint whoever he wished to act in his place.<sup>309</sup>

At committee, general and delegate meetings, Evans always had thugs, mainly some Greyshirts and Lorry Drivers, led by a man called Simpson. He was the agent for the Lorry Drivers' Union. At least two delegates' meetings were broken up by these thugs, at the instigation of

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306. SAGWU Minutes: 30 December 1936 (joint meeting with representatives of the Garment Workers' Union, (Transvaal) - GWUSA Archives).

307. Ibid.

308. Ibid.

309. David Lunn, 'Statement', 1945 op.cit., paragraph 22.

Evans.<sup>310</sup>

On one occasion, some committee members and myself officially invited Evans, and asked him for the Minute Book and also to see what had transpired in the past as the Minutes were not properly kept and did not record what happened at meetings. The Minutes were written up not giving an account of what happened, but to suit Evans...Our books and records all along were kept in Stuart's office. Stuart refused to allow me to go through the Minutes and even refused me permission to check up the balance sheets which I knew were not correct.<sup>311</sup>

Lunn had been co-operating with Weinberg and the SAGWU since about September 1936.<sup>312</sup> Early in November the Cape Union held a general meeting to discuss the proposal that the constitution be altered to allow for the election of officials and the executive committee at an annual general meeting open to all members. The meeting voted in favour of this suggestion. But the bureaucrats responded by saying (correctly) that the general meeting had no power under the constitution and that the resolution was not binding on the executive. They followed this up by expelling Lunn and Mussell, the chairman and vice-chairman of the Union, as "they were associated with certain members of the S.A. Garment Workers' Union".<sup>313</sup>

This time the controllers had overstepped the mark. Two days after the expulsions there was a shop stewards' meeting:

Since the majority of the shop-stewards present insisted that they would not allow the meeting to be held without the presence of the chairman and vice-chairman, the

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310. David Lunn, 'Statement', 1945 op.cit., paragraph 35. Simpson, a member of the CFLU executive, was a witness in a defamation action brought by Poole against the printers of a SAGWU leaflet handed out at the November general meeting. Forward reported (12 June 1936), that Simpson "...admitted having struck E. Weinberg...with his fist because Weinberg tried to enter the meeting. He admitted also, the holding of another, which was attended by a number of Lorry Drivers, Bakers and a half-dozen police. Simpson said in the course of evidence, 'If I had hit Weinberg square in the face he would have gone to sleep'".

311. David Lunn, 'Statement', 1945 op.cit., paragraph 36.

312. SAGWU Minutes: 12 September 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

313. Weinberg, 'The Position...' op.cit.

officials insisted on sabotaging the meeting and it could not discuss any matters on the agenda.<sup>314</sup>

In addition,

...a circular threatening the Executive Committee to cancel the existing stop-orders if the two members were not reinstated within a fortnight was signed by well over twelve hundred workers.<sup>315</sup>

The outburst of popular opposition to the officials exposed tensions within the controlling group. Poole, although the industrial council agent, remained powerful within the Union. He wrote an angry letter to Stuart in which he said:

We have power to turn Lunn out of the Union, but we have no power to keep him out if he wishes to force the issue.

Under the Constitution an expelled member...can ask for a ballot of the whole Union, and claim the ballot on the issue as he himself chooses to define it. From the general feeling throughout the Union I think he would come back with flying colours....

(I)t is better to make our own terms and let him return, rather than he should return as a conqueror.<sup>316</sup>

Stuart had obviously thrown a tantrum at the way the Union was being disrupted. Poole continued:

...(Y)our statement, "Let the Union smash up" I cannot nor will I accept as a sane policy nor the right line to take. Harry Evans has dragged this Union together with superhuman effort and I undertake that it will continue. Neither you, nor I, nor the Federation nor the T.& L.C. nor any other individual has the right to say "Let the Union smash if we cannot have it our own way". I may tell you frankly that the Garment Wor-

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314. Weinberg, 'The Position...' op.cit.

315. Ibid.

316. Letter from Poole to Stuart, 24 November 1936 (GWUSA Archives, Bcc 1.20.1).

kers' Union is not going to smash up for the sake of personalities.<sup>317</sup>

The expulsions of Lunn and Mussell were rescinded. The rulers had to bow to the pressure of the membership, not unaided by a court judgement ordering Lunn's reinstatement.<sup>318</sup>

Another petition was presented to the Union for a ballot to compel the executive to amend the constitution in order that a new executive and new officials could be elected at a general members' meeting in January 1937. As Weinberg said:

...(T)he present Industrial Agreement operating in the Industry is expiring in April this year, and the workers can under no circumstances entrust the present committee with the task of negotiating a new agreement. It is quite likely that the officials of the Union will for this reason sabotage the requisition.<sup>319</sup>

Sure enough, no changes were made to the constitution. The reactionary officials held onto their power and used it as before. But opposition was growing. Rose Crawford began to vote with the opposition on the executive. The executive meeting at which Poole presented a new draft agreement broke up in disorder without the agreement being approved.<sup>320</sup> Weinberg predicted:

But that does not matter very much and the likelihood is that they will proceed and apply for registration of the agreement.<sup>321</sup>

In March 1937, Lunn was fired from his job at African Clothing.<sup>322</sup> He later alleged that this was part of a conspiracy between Poole, Evans and his employer, Simon Roytowski, to end his activities in the Union.<sup>323</sup> The SAGWU launched a campaign for his reinstatement.

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317. Letter from Poole to Stuart, 24 November 1936, *ibid.*

318. Letter from Lunn to the Secretary, CFLU, 5 May 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

319. Weinberg, 'The Position...' *op.cit.*

320. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 24 February 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

321. *Ibid.*

322. Guardian 12 March 1937 'Garment Workers Uneasy - Threat of Strike'.

323. Letter from Lunn to the Secretary, CFLU, 5 May 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

ment which brought out all the grievances of the members against the Stuart Machine in the Union. Meetings were held at the factories and a long resolution was adopted. This condemned Lunn's dismissal as victimisation and demanded,

...the removal from the Executive Committee of all those officials who have deliberately refused to listen to the demands of workers and have acted detrimentally against the interests of the Union.<sup>324</sup>

The workers dissociated themselves from the industrial council negotiations because of irregularities in the election of delegates and demanded that the Wage Board recommendation be used as a basis of any new agreement. The resolution continued:

We demand the immediate attention of the Executive Committee...to the requisition of members to change the constitution of the Union which was already handed in in November 1936 and has not been attended to since. We pledge ourselves to continue the fight and not to rest until we have gained quarterly general meetings, all control of union affairs by the general meeting of members and election of the officers and Executive Committee of the Union either by general ballot or by a general meeting of the Union.<sup>325</sup>

In response to this, "the bosses together with the officials of the C.G.W.U." organized a ballot at the factories to approve the new 'agreement'.<sup>326</sup> Tactically, this was a very shrewd move. If workers voted "No", the industry would revert to the low wages of the Determination No.42. If they voted, as they must, to approve the 'agreement', the officials could claim it as a vote of confidence. A SAGWU meeting pondered how the ballot could be stopped. Freestone had also issued a circular promoting the agreement which had not been authorised by the executive. Lunn challenged the officials for conducting the ballot without the

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324. Guardian 19 March 1937 'Garment Workers Again'.

325. Ibid.

326. SAGWU Minutes: 25 March 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

approval of the executive. The officials then rigged Lunn's expulsion from the Union,

...in a most irregular manner by packing the Executive with people who had no vote, and then proceeding to vote for the expulsion despite the protests of more than half the legal Executive and the ruling of Mussell who was in the chair.<sup>327</sup>

Weinberg wrote to Sachs that the SAGWU had decided against upsetting the agreement (which could be easily done through the courts because of all the irregularities in its preparation).<sup>328</sup> There would only be a point in taking such a step if the garment workers were strongly enough organized to stop the employers reducing wages. Weinberg wrote,

...(We could) say "alright we are going to protect our interests by resorting to the mobilising of the workers for direct action and with some amount of pressure we might be able to compel the employers to grant us a new agreement with a flat rate of wages". But such (a) policy presupposed firstly control of the official union and secondly command of some funds. We had neither and it would have been adventurous to embark on a policy like that without the necessary preparation and prerequisites....(W)ith the weakness of the [SAGWU] organization at the present moment the workers would have suffered.<sup>329</sup>

In any event, the fight for control in the Union was entering another crucial stage. The Union executive committee was split 5:5 with Crawford still voting against the officials. The delegates' meeting (shop stewards) was solidly against them.<sup>330</sup> The latter meeting voted to reinstate Lunn and protested strongly against the "high-handed action of the E.C."<sup>331</sup> But the constitution allowed the executive to override this advisory vote, which

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327. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 15 May 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

328. Ibid.

329. Ibid.

330. Ibid.

331. Quoted in letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 9 June 1937 (GWUSA Archives).



it did by five votes to four, and Lunn was permanently expelled. He was unable to find employment in the clothing industry and had to leave Cape Town.<sup>332</sup> As Weinberg remarked,

"they rule with force and not with reason".

The SAGWU was expecting to make decisive gains in the June elections for the shop stewards who (as the delegates' meeting) would elect a new executive. Weinberg wrote to Sachs:

...(W)e are already preparing our nominations and we hope to get this time a clear majority on the E.C.<sup>333</sup>

The SAGWU forces within the GWU-CP were growing. So confident was Weinberg of the strength of the opposition movement generated in the campaign that he willingly accepted the Transvaal union's decision to close its Cape Town office and cease its financial support for the SAGWU in July 1937.<sup>334</sup>

This action must have been totally incomprehensible to the rank and file garment workers who had thrilled to the speeches of Sachs to fight Stuart & Co. to the bitter end and not to leave Cape Town until a national union of garment workers had been formed. The results of ending the Transvaal union's material support for the SAGWU, after all Weinberg's hopeful reports, were probably equally surprising to Solly Sachs.

## 12 The Illusion of National Unity

The Transvaal union ceased to finance and direct the Cape Town campaign in July 1937 because Robert Stuart insisted upon it. The national trade union movement, so fiercely divided in 1935, had reached a position where unity between the North and the South seemed a real possibility. The CFLU, however, refused to commit itself to unity in any practical way as long as Solly Sachs' union was laying siege to its garment worker citadel. In order to "faci-

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332. Interview with David Lunn. The CCI apparently warned all its members against employing him. Weinberg indicates that Lunn had alienated many of his supporters by the time of his expulsion, which may explain the lack of further protest. (See Weinberg to Sachs, 15 May 1937).

333. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 9 June 1937.

334. Letter from Sachs to Weinberg, 16 July 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

litate the creation of one National Trade Union Centre", the Transvaal union withdrew from the Cape and "tried to come to an understanding with the Cape Garment Workers' Union by peaceful negotiation".<sup>335</sup>

The foundations for this attempt at victory through diplomacy had been laid since the SAGWU stopped its frontal attack on the Cape Union in mid-1936. Sachs gave support to those elements working inside the Cape Union who believed in national unity. He began to ply the Union officials with proposals for a national unity agreement. Even if SAGWU supporters inside the Union were a long time in capturing full control, their growing strength could be used to push to Cape officials into some form of national co-operation before then. This strategy appeared to pay off. In October 1936, the Cape Union cautiously agreed to attend a national conference of clothing trade unions.<sup>336</sup> It stipulated that no persons "attached to any unregistered union in the Cape Area should attend".<sup>337</sup> Sachs agreed to this condition.<sup>338</sup> He was waiting for the GWU-CP to commit itself to dates for the conference when the Transvaal union formally closed its Cape Town office in July.

At this time there is every indication that Sachs and Weinberg believed that the influence of SAGWU members within the factories was great enough,

...to ensure a majority of our supporters on the Shop Stewards and Executive Committee of the Cape Garment Workers' Union.<sup>339</sup>

SAGWU members would,

follow this up by putting Comrade Weinberg up as Secretary, (or) alternately come to an understanding with Freestone and let Freestone remain Secretary with Comrade Weinberg as organizer.<sup>340</sup>

Such an outcome would provide a firm base for reaching unity through

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335. 'R. Stuart versus E.S. Sachs', c.1945. paragraph 11 (GWUSA Archives).

336. Letter from GWU-CP to Sachs, 12 October 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

337. Ibid.

338. Letter from Sachs to GWU-CP, 25 January 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

339. GWUSA CEC Minutes: 9 July 1937 (GWUSA Archives, Baa 1).

340. Ibid.

negotiation. Sachs advised the CEC of his union to dissolve the SAGWU.<sup>341</sup>

Sachs and Weinberg seriously miscalculated. The archives of the GWUSA do not contain specific information on the outcome of the Cape Union elections, but it is clear that the SAGWU supporters were not as successful as had been expected. The SAGWU was not dissolved, although it ceased to be a branch of the Transvaal union and a recipient of its funds.<sup>342</sup> Weinberg continued in office as the secretary although this was no longer a paid position. SAGWU activists continued to meet together and to organize inside the Cape Union. The CDC Annual Report for 1937/8 listed the SAGWU with a membership of 1 400. The efforts to secure democracy inside the GWU-CP and to further the aim of unity did not end simply because the SAGWU was no longer part of the Transvaal union. However both efforts ultimately failed. The SAGWU gradually declined until, in mid-1938, it was dissolved.

Although the decline of the SAGWU dates from the Transvaal's withdrawal of support, this cannot be seen as the crucial factor that caused the campaign to fail. The SAGWU campaign had organized a substantial body of opposition to the Cape Union leadership amongst the garment workers of Cape Town. Support from these workers, not money from the Transvaal, was the principal force behind the progress of the SAGWU campaign. Certainly, the paid organizers and Transvaal advisers were essential in the first stages of organization, but only growth in the number of worker activists could ensure the success of the campaign. The Transvaal union had funded the SAGWU for two and a half years and had invested the time and energies of its officials in the Cape campaign. If, after all this effort, the campaign could not sustain itself,

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341. GWUSA CEC Minutes: 9 July 1937 (GWUSA Archives, Baa 1).

342. The Transvaal union was paying £30 a month to the SAGWU until July 1937. It also stepped in every now and then to pay off accumulated debts. It sent £550 for the I.L. Back strike alone. (See letters from Sachs to Weinberg, 16 July 1937; Weinberg to NEC TLC, 30 April 1936). At one stage, Weinberg claimed, the SAGWU was self-financing (Interview - see footnote 87, above). Once it began the attack from within, its supporters would have paid subscriptions to the Cape union, thus making the Transvaal payments essential to maintain the office and paid organizers.

the reasons for failure lie beyond the withdrawal of Transvaal support. They are to be found in the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town - in the prevalence of the Stuart Machine in the garment industry, in the actions of the Department of Labour, and in the attitudes of the bosses. These forces were not weakened by the Transvaal union's abandonment of the SAGWU.

But even this is too limited an interpretation of the collapse of the SAGWU and the militant spirit which garment workers had shown during the campaign for a fighting trade unionism in Cape Town. Viewed from another perspective, the SAGWU was not given a chance to survive. The withdrawal of Transvaal support was sudden. The SAGWU had no alternative source of finance and had to scale down its activities immediately. But not only was the SAGWU deprived of assistance from the Transvaal union, the TLC found the SAGWU an embarrassment in its efforts to negotiate a settlement with the CFLU. The CDC was hindered by the TLC from offering the fullest support to the SAGWU. The SAGWU was a sacrifice to the cause of unity. How did this come about?

The retreat of the Transvaal garment workers' union from Cape Town was a tactical move on the part of the TLC. It was made in order to consolidate gains made at the expense of the CFLU on a much broader front. In the space of two and a half years the CDC had become a potent threat to the old guard in the Federation. Its presence had assisted power-shifts within Federation affiliates. Stuart's dominance in the Cape labour movement had been challenged and was crumbling.<sup>343</sup>

The SAGWU had been a most important element in the revival of the CDC. It had been the fastest growing of the new unions and the most productive of propaganda against the Stuart machine. Weinberg, as the secretary of the CDC, used his base amongst the garment workers to promote national trade union unity as well as national unity for garment workers.<sup>344</sup> The SAGWU sent delegates to the Trade Union Unity Conference in Cape Town in February 1936. This involved 55 representatives from 14 Cape Town unions, including

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343. See Williams (1974).

344. See 'CDC Report for the period 27 May 1936 to 14 April 1937' (GWUSA Archives).

six unions affiliated to the CFLU. (The leaders of the Federation, of course, did not attend).<sup>345</sup>

By May 1938, the CDC included about 7 000 workers in ten unions, not counting CDC supporters allied to the SAGWU. Williams (1974, p.12) estimates that this equalled the effective membership of the CFLU. These ten unions were in industries not organized by the CFLU.<sup>346</sup> There were 'old' unions such as the Engineers' and Iron Moulders', which were branches of national unions centrally affiliated to the TLC. The largest unions in the CDC were of railway, harbour and dock workers. Small new unions had been established among the sweet and chemical workers (in which Ray Alexander was active). The SAGWU was the only union that was a direct rival of a Federation affiliate. However, the presence of a Transvaal-controlled body like the CDC in its home territory, was both hateful and threatening to the isolationist leaders of the Federation.

Not all the Federation leaders were as paranoid as Stuart about co-operation with the national union movement. The CFLU entered into a unity agreement with the TLC after a conference at Kimberley in March 1937. This established a National Joint Committee of six representatives from the two bodies. It was to meet quarterly and act as the mouthpiece of the trade union movement. (Williams, 1974, p.11). But the Federation remained dissatisfied with the existence of the CDC. In late 1937, the TLC proposed to disband the CDC on condition that its affiliated unions could join the CFLU. The Federation was to accept representatives of six CDC unions as full members of its general council.<sup>347</sup>

The CDC itself and the workers it had organized in Cape Town had no say in this transaction. While the CDC saw the need for unity as well as any NEC member, it was unhappy about the absolute subordination of the CDC to the will of the NEC. In particular,

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345. 'Trade Union Unity Conference in Cape Town - Momentous Move in the Establishment of One National Trade Union Centre' n.d. (GWUSA Archives, Cba 2.4.1); SAGWU Minutes: 24 February 1936. (GWUSA Archives).

346. CDC Report for the period April 1937 to May 1938 (GWUSA Archives) (hereinafter 'CDC Report 1937/8').

347. Ibid.

it resented that "its right to organize workers (was) to be curtailed".<sup>348</sup> NEC members then met with the CDC and stated that the Federation,

...had raised objections to co-operating with certain individuals of the Cape District Committee. It was also pointed out, that in order to come to some understanding with the Federation, it was essential to make concessions. On the other hand the Cape District Committee, whilst agreeing on the need for a "give and take" policy felt that it was unwise and impermissible to make concessions on matters of principle.<sup>349</sup>

The CDC,

...still did not approve of the contents of the agreement, but [it commented] it could evidently do very little to prevent its confirmation.<sup>350</sup>

Several CDC unions would not be directly represented on the Federation. The CDC commented that

...(this) is rather a severe penalty to pay for unity. The position tends rather to aggravate the bitterness and feeling of injustice. The Cape District Committee proposed that each Union be given one delegate on the Federation's General Council, but this proposal was not accepted.<sup>351</sup>

The absorption of the CDC by the CFLU was part of a power-sharing agreement between trade union 'politicians' who wanted to 'unite' the South African labour movement. It was not related to any intention of extending or consolidating the spirit of militancy among Cape Town workers which had emerged during the campaigns of the previous two years. It was not related to the previously

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348. CDC resolution of meeting on 10 November 1937, quoted in CDC Report 1937/8, op.cit.

349. CDC Report 1937/8, op.cit.

350. Ibid.

351. Ibid.

declared need to build a solid union movement in Cape Town. In fact the militant unionism supported by the TLC in Cape Town after 1935, as is exemplified in the SAGWU campaigns, might appear to a cynical analyst, wise with hindsight, to have been a mere ploy to weaken Stuart's dominance over the Cape Town labour movement in order that 'unity' could be achieved. The reasons for the decline of the SAGWU must be located primarily in the conditions of class struggle existing in Cape Town and the clothing industry. But one can still maintain that the SAGWU was a sacrifice to 'unity'. Its existence was crucial in the campaign to undermine the power of the Stuart Machine in Cape Town. Yet in mid-1938 Weinberg was forced to wind up what remained of the SAGWU to set the seal on national unity in the labour movement. The Cape Union, in return, gave an undertaking that it,

...would collaborate with the garment workers' union in the Transvaal in a sort of federation of clothing workers.<sup>352</sup>

The disbanding of the CDC and the entry of its main constituents into the CFLU ultimately contributed to Stuart's resignation as secretary and to the absorption of the CFLU and most of the major Cape Unions by the TLC. However, this took another three years to materialize.

The Transvaal garment workers' union had been persuaded to cut its constitutional and financial ties with the SAGWU to clear the way for national unity between the trade union movements of the North and the South. It agreed to this step because it believed that the campaign it had started in Cape Town would, anyway, shortly be victorious. Here it was mistaken. The union did not immediately resume the Cape Town campaign because this would jeopardize North-South unity negotiations and because Sachs still had hopes that his peaceful persuasion would convince the Cape Union of the need for a national garment workers' union. Several former SAGWU activists were members of the GWU-CP executive committee and could put pressure on the officials to enter negotiations with the Transvaal union. But the disbanding of the SAGWU marked the defeat

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352. Interview with Eli Weinberg (see footnote 87, above).

of the campaign to establish a militant union for garment workers in Cape Town.

Sachs had a draft constitution for a Co-ordinating Council of garment trade unions ready for discussion from early in 1937.<sup>353</sup> The Cape Union officials avoided all attempts to arrange a meeting. In 1938 Sachs prepared a draft agreement, by which a National Council of Clothing Workers, including the Transvaal, Cape and Durban unions, would work towards forming a single union and forming a national industrial council.<sup>354</sup> Members of the Cape Union's executive committee in favour of unity pushed through a resolution to attend a national conference<sup>355</sup> but again the officials succeeded in delaying the meeting.<sup>356</sup>

In an attempt to put pressure on the Cape Union and Cape employers to consider unity seriously once more, the Transvaal union and the TCMA requested a new Wage Board inquiry. This was undertaken but to no purpose. The new Wage Board refused to countenance making a new determination to eliminate the wage differential between the Rand and the coast. It commented that:

for more than a decade, wages on the Rand have been some 20 per cent higher than at the coast and during that period the industry has prospered and expanded to a greater extent than have its coastal competitors.<sup>357</sup>

Sachs, convinced as ever of the importance of national unity, continued patiently to write letters to the Cape Union. Stuart replaced Freestone as secretary in 1939 but Sachs was undeterred. He wrote effusively to the executive:

Ten thousand garment workers are now awaiting the decision of the Cape Garment Workers.

I sincerely hope that the Cape Garment Workers, and

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353. Letter from Sachs to the Secretary, GWU-CP, 25 January 1937 (GWUSA Archives).

354. Undated memorandum proposing the formation of such a body from 1 January 1939 (GWUSA Archives).

355. Letter from Weinberg to Sachs, 16 August 1938 (GWUSA Archives).

356. 'Report of the General Secretary on his visit to Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town - November 1938' (GWUSA Archives).

357. Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938 op.cit., paragraph 72.



that you, dear comrades, will not be long in making a decision which will result in a mighty army of garment workers being built up, which will go forward unitedly and determinedly, fighting for a happier and better life for all garment workers, and have a real voice in the trade union movement as a whole.<sup>358</sup>

The long-awaited conference was finally convened in 1942!<sup>359</sup>

Stuart had no intention of allowing a national union of garment workers to emerge under the leadership of the Transvaal. He continued to use the tactics - which served him so well in keeping the CFLU out of the national trade union movement over so many years - of paying lip service to unity but opposing all practical efforts to achieve it.<sup>360</sup>

Solly Sachs wrote to Rose Crawford in 1936, while she was assisting the SAGWU in Cape Town:

There can be no unity with Bosses' pimps unless they give up their pimping - and then they can hardly be trusted. Therein lies the great importance of the struggle of the Cape Garment Workers.<sup>361</sup>

This is a fitting epitaph on the second Cape campaign. It is a lesson that the Transvaal Union never really learnt despite re-experiencing its truth in the subsequent Cape campaigns and unity efforts up to 1960. Today the leaders of the Garment Workers' Union of South Africa have little use for such insights. They have learnt a different lesson from their Cape counterparts - pimping pays.

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358. Letter from Sachs to the Executive Committee, GWU-CP, 15 February 1939 (GWUSA Archives).

359. Minutes: 23, 24, 25 August 1942 (GWUSA Archives).

360. In 1944 Sachs was still writing. His tone however had changed. He wrote to Stuart, "You have fooled us long enough in regard to national unity. You never had the slightest intention to build or help to build a national trade union of garment workers ....You wanted war and you shall have it, and this time when we come down to Cape Town to speak to our fellow workers we shall finish the job if we have to spend ten years doing it" ( 7 September 1944 - GWUSA Archives).

361. Letter from Sachs to Crawford, 19 March 1936 (GWUSA Archives).

Table 6.4: Comparative Table of Wages of Female Machinists, 1932-1937

Column	8	9	8a	10	10a	12	13	14
Quarterly Periods	Wage Determination 42 (see note to Table 4.2 above)	Wage Board recommendation July 1935	Agreement negotiated May - July 1935. Amended by CWCMA in July 1935	First Cape Town Industrial Council agreement July 1935 - gazetted April 1936	Packers' wages under the Industrial Council Agreement (see the note below) *	Transvaal Industrial Council Agreement Feb. 1934 to Apr. 1935	Transvaal Industrial Council Agreement Apr. 1935 to May 1937	Transvaal Industrial Council Agreement May 1937
1st 3 mths:	15/-	18/-	18/-	18/-	15/-	19/-	20/-	20/-
2nd	17/6	22/-	18/-	18/-	17/6	21/3	22/6	22/6
3rd	17/6	26/-	21/-	21/-	17/6	23/9	25/-	25/-
4th	17/6	30/-	21/-	21/-	22/6	26/3	27/6	27/6
5th	25/-	32/-	25/-	25/-	25/-	28/6	30/-	30/-
6th	25/-	34/-	25/-	25/-	25/-	31/-	32/6	32/6
7th	25/-	36/-	30/-	30/-	27/6	33/3	35/-	35/-
8th	25/-	38/-	30/-	30/-	27/6	38/-	40/-	40/-
9th	32/6	40/-	35/-	35/-	32/6	42/9	45/-	45/-
10th	32/6	42/-	35/-	35/-	32/6	42/9	45/-	45/-
11th	32/6	45/-	40/-	40/-	32/6	47/6	50/-	50/-
12th	32/6	45/-	40/-	40/-	32/6	47/6	50/-	50/-
4th year:	40/-	45/-	42/6	45/-	32/6	47/6	50/-	55/-
Qual- ified Wage:	40/-	45/-	42/6	45/-	32/6	47/6	50/-	55/-

\* The Wage Board and the Transvaal industrial council agreements only set 'flat' minimum wages. The minima applied to all men and women, whatever their specific jobs. By contrast, the Cape Town industrial council agreement had, by October 1936, twelve job categories, each with its own 'wage path'. The wage of the female machinists is thus no longer as good an indicator of the wage level as before. For example, while machinists started at 18/- a week and earned at least 45/- after 36 months experience; packers started at 15/- and reached a 'top minimum' wage of 32/6 after 24 months. Cleaners, markers, sorters, bobbin-girls and loose collar ironers started at 15/- and qualified after 12 months to a wage of 25/-. Slopers and seam pressers started at 15/- and qualified after 24 months to a wage of 30/-. Plain sewers and table hands started at 18/- and qualified after 24 months to a wage of 35/-. Column 10a shows the 'wage path' for packers.

Sources: Table 4.2 above; CWCMA Minutes: 19 July 1935 - M2/1;  
Government Gazette 16 Feb. 1934; 18 Mar. 1935; 21 May 1937.

## CHAPTER VII

A RUDE AWAKENING

I started working in the industry some years before I joined the S.A. Garment Workers. Nobody from the Cape Union asked me to join the Cape Union. I did not know of its existence. At that time I earned the top wage - £2 per week. It was a very low wage. We were not really dissatisfied because we did not know any better. The workers were dormant. The Cape Union was also dormant. I thought the S.A. Garment Workers was to wake up the Cape Union.

- Mrs. D. Julius, executive committee member GWU-CF, 1949.<sup>1</sup>

In retrospect, the second campaign of the Transvaal union in Cape Town was a decisive event in the history of South Africa's garment workers. Although the campaign did not attain its most ambitious objectives, it was not a complete failure and its consequences for the future of the Cape garment workers were wide-ranging and long-lasting.

The basic aim of the Transvaal union in launching its campaign was to force the Cape clothing factories to raise wages. This would blunt the intensity of the competition in the garment industry between the low-wage Cape and the higher-wage Transvaal. The union could then win further improvements in the wages and conditions of Transvaal workers. In this basic aim the campaign succeeded. Agitation from the Transvaal union caused the Wage Board to investigate the clothing industry. Sachs marshalled evidence for the Wage Board sittings which influenced the high wages it recommended. The organization of Cape garment workers in the SAGWU and in the GWU-CP forced the bosses to concede higher wages than would otherwise have been the case. As a direct result of the campaign an industrial council was formed and an agreement enacted which raised Cape garment workers' wages substantially. The industrial council was able to police this agreement more effectively than the Department of Labour enforced the old wage determinations. For the following twenty years, wages in the Transvaal garment industry,

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1. Garment Workers' Union Commission of Inquiry: Minutes of Evidence, p.69 (GWUSA Archives, Bca 4).

which had never risen above the levels set ten years previously, rose steadily. Although the wage differential between the Cape and Transvaal industries persisted, wages in the Cape also followed an upward trend.<sup>2</sup> The second Cape campaign served as a warning to the Cape employers of the consequences of lagging too far behind Transvaal wage levels.

The campaign had its greatest and most direct effects on the workers and employers in the Cape clothing industry. It led to the re-creation of the Cape Union and an expanded unity of the manufacturers. The organizations of the workers and manufacturers were given purpose and permanence by the establishment of the industrial council. Industrial council agreements have regulated the wages and conditions of work in the Cape garment industry continuously from 1936 to the present. The undemocratic constitution of the Cape Union, which played its part in stopping numerous subsequent efforts to unseat the leadership, was approved by the Department of Labour as a result of the campaign.

The ability of the Union leaders to secure higher wages and better conditions was limited by the way in which the industrial council and the Union itself had been formed. The Union owed its existence to the bosses. It relied on stop orders administered (or imposed) by the bosses for its income. Its base of popular support amongst the workers was questionable. Many shop stewards were former SAGWU activists and any attempt to use organized worker power to put pressure on the bosses would serve to strengthen their influence. The organization of the workers in the factories could provide new impetus for a challenge to the leaders. From the start, the Union leaders tended to be remote from the membership in order to retain their control over the Union and their official positions. While the old Stuart Machine was crumbling in the Cape Labour movement under attacks from all sides, it was being cloned in the new Garment Workers' Union.

But the employers did not exert direct control over the actions of the Union leaders and industrial council representatives. The Union leaders used strong words in the approaches they made to CWCMA<sup>3</sup> and were frequently stubborn in refusing to agree to

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2. See Appendix A, Graphs A.4 and A.5, below.

3. See, for example, letter from Freestone (general secretary of the GWU-CP) to "the employers' representatives on the Industrial Council", 25 January 1937 (CCI Archives).

compromises suggested by the employers. This attitude was not a mere display to refute the charges that they were bosses' stooges, or a misinterpretation of the employers' earlier injunction to be more militant.<sup>4</sup> The Union leaders were not simply stooges. They had not fought so bitterly against higher wages and Solly Sachs primarily for the bosses but for themselves. They had to blend their powerful control over the Union with a measure of economic advancement for their members. The better the wages they negotiated, the safer were their jobs. So wages and hours were hotly debated in the industrial council meetings. The Union regularly made demands for improved conditions that horrified the employers.<sup>5</sup>

The employers took time to adjust to the new conditions they faced under the industrial council system. They had been forced into establishing an industrial council in order to stop the Wage Board setting higher wages and also to stop Sachs from winning control over the Cape Garment Workers' Union. Their participation in an industrial council was for them the least of three evils. The CWCMA saw no need to institutionalize industrial conflict or enter a debate with their employees over the wages they paid them. Ideally, the function of the industrial council was to police the agreement and prevent unfair competition from sweatshops. They resented its interference in wage questions. This is illustrated in a CWCMA meeting in August 1939, called to discuss the Union's proposals for a new agreement to replace the one about to expire. A.A. Millar of Bertish (the new chairman of the CWCMA<sup>6</sup>),

...said that the demands made by the Union were preposterous, and he was not satisfied with an Agreement being negotiated every year as insufficient time was allowed to enable the adjustments to be made and extra costs absorbed. He thought that it would be more advantageous to have a Wage Determination which would continue for four or five years, and he would rather

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4. See pp.297/8, above.

5. See, for example, CWCMA Minutes: 24 March 1938 (Annual General Meeting); 23 August 1939; 10 September 1940; 1 November 1944; 15 March 1946 - M2.

6. Millar had succeeded William Middlemass, the original leader of Cape Town's clothing manufacturers, in 1937 (CWCMA Minutes: 4 May 1937 - M2/1).

work under a Determination than under the present conditions. He said that if the Agreement could not be extended for two years he was prepared to give three months' notice of his firm's resignation from the Council.<sup>7</sup>

Other employers supported Millar's sentiments but Edgar Jacobs pointed out that the Wage Board might raise wages up to Transvaal levels. He commented that,

....although the demands by the Union were preposterous in the eyes of members, they were not in excess of wages being paid in the Transvaal.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually the manufacturers pressurized the Union into extending the existing agreement. The Union could not afford to let an agreement lapse before a new one was negotiated, as this would effectively remove a legally enforceable minimum wage. The 1932 Wage Determination, with its depression wage-levels, would then apply. However the bosses were also not keen to return to such a low scale of wages as this would bring back intense competition from small and unscrupulous firms who paid the lowest wages possible.

Disagreements, often severe disagreements, between the employers and the Union seem to be the rule rather than the exception in negotiations at least up to the early 1960's.<sup>9</sup> The following four random examples from the minutes of the CWCMA indicate the serious light in which the employers regarded these challenges from the Union. In 1946, the CWCMA asked for a Wage Board investigation because Union demands for higher wages and shorter hours,

...were imposing an unnecessary economic strain on the industry.<sup>10</sup>

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7. CWCMA Minutes: 23 August 1939 - M2/1.

8. Ibid.

9. See, for example, CWCMA Minutes: 27 May 1946; 11 April 1947; 4 August 1948; 30 March 1955; 19 March 1961 - M2/1. I have not consulted the minutes of the CWCMA after 1957. From 1936 to this date they minute only discussions amongst the employers. All joint employer-union meetings would be recorded in the Industrial Council minutes to which I have been denied access. A thorough study of the ICCI (Cape) archives is needed to judge my hypotheses on the period after 1939.

10. CWCMA Minutes: 27 May 1946 - M2.

In 1949, Simon Roytowski reacted to Union pressure with the statement that,

If the Union gave any trouble the Industry could revert to a Wage Determination.<sup>11</sup>

In 1955, the Union refused to compromise on its demands until there was a real danger that the industry would find itself regulated by the 1932 Wage Determination. S.R. Back said,

...He felt that the present stand of the trade union did not reflect the true attitude of the workers.<sup>12</sup>

Again in 1961, negotiations ended in deadlock.<sup>13</sup> These random examples do not seem to accord with the actions of a "bosses' union".

But these conflicts between the employers and the Union did not indicate a growing independence of mind on the part of the Union. The disagreements were subject to certain constraints, the effectiveness of which is seen in the fact that the industrial council has never collapsed (as it did in the Transvaal in 1932-33). The commonality of interest which the GWU-CP leaders shared with the CWCMA was made most obvious when the Transvaal union appeared on the scene to promote a nation-wide union of garment workers. The Union-boss alliance was essential to the defeat of the Transvaal union's efforts to win the support of Cape workers for national unity. In 1945 and 1954-5 in particular, when the Transvaal union ran expensive organizing and publicity campaigns amongst Cape garment workers to promote the idea of a single union, the bosses, the Union leaders and the police acted in consort.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, in the period after 1939, Union reliance on the employers acquired new dimensions. Firstly, the "closed shop" agreement became a weapon of the Union leaders in defeating new generations of dissidents.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, during the War the industrial

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11. CWCMA Minutes: 5 September 1949 - M2.

12. CWCMA Minutes: 4 July 1955 - M2.

13. CWCMA Minutes: 29 March 1961 - M2.

14. See Nicol (1977).

15. See, for example, Nicol (1977, p.92). In 1946, John Shadrach apparently lost his job as a result of the closed shop clause after his expulsion from the Union (Shadrach v. Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula, Cape Supreme Court Motions 8(464)

council began to establish benefit funds for the workers. Membership of the funds was compulsory. Workers' contributions were deducted from their wages each week. Employers also contributed directly to the funds a weekly sum proportional to the size of their factories. First a sick fund was started and then an unemployment fund. These were followed in 1954 by a provident fund. The industrial council-administered funds further limited the ability of the Union to sustain any confrontation with the employers. The funds relied heavily on employer contributions. If the industrial council collapsed workers would lose one of the few benefits of Union membership as well as the money paid by the employers into the fund (in effect a part of their wage).

Today the GWU-CP has its strongest claim to existence in its role as a distributor and organizer of (small) benefits for garment workers.<sup>16</sup> The leaders still count on the support of the employers in defeating efforts of Union members to challenge their dynastic sway. (This was demonstrated a few years ago in the failure of an "Action Committee" to unseat them (Bloch, 1982; Maree, 1976). The Union has never called or supported a strike. Both the Union and the manufacturers often express their pride in their good relationship which has preserved 'industrial peace' in the Cape clothing industry over nearly fifty years.

There is a striking continuity in the leadership style in the Garment Workers' Union between the period of our study and the present. The leaders are remote from their membership, are protected in office by a rigid and undemocratic constitution and are intolerant of dissent. They rely on the employers' aid in stifling opposition. They retain an aversion to any involvement in politics. But these continuities should not lead us to assume a lack of change in the manner in which the Union has maintained

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1946 - C.A.D.). In 1941 the CWCMA agreed that the closed shop clause would be applied as and when requested by the Union (CWCMA Minutes: 2 October 1941 - CCI Archives). In 1946, Roytowski reminded a CWCMA meeting that "the manufacturers themselves had originally insisted on having this clause in the Agreement" to foil the organizing efforts of the Transvaal union (CWCMA Minutes: 22 April 1946 - CCI Archives). The closed shop's most important functions remained that of keeping up Union membership figures and stop order income.

16. The Argus of 7 November 1983 reported that, "...the general secretary of the Garment Workers' Union, Mr. L. Petersen, has said the union is 'proud' to be described as a benefit society".



the division and effective disorganization of garment workers. This central function of the Union has been mediated through the industrial council system.

Few authors see the industrial council system in an historical perspective. Davies and Lever point to the bureaucratising effects of the Industrial Conciliation Act in the 1920's and modern commentators, noticing bureaucracy and a lack of militancy in unions today simply invoke the general explanations put forward for that earlier period. The industrial council system tends to promote good negotiators rather than good organizers, conflict is removed from the factory floor to secret meetings, common interests between union officials and managers multiply across the negotiating table etc. All this points to a badly organized, apathetic union membership and an entrenched leadership, remote from the workers. My contention is that the industrial council system can only be understood historically and concretely.

The industrial council system has never been a single system - it has different effects in different localities and industries, which are ruled by different conditions of class struggle. Over time the system has grown new tentacles as well as strengthening older ones. The industrial council system of today may perform the same function as that of 50 years ago but the way it achieves that function is different. One of the key innovations of the system has been the use of worker benefit funds to control unions. In the 1920's employers were not involved in any benefits a union might provide. Today employers are heavily involved and in addition may control pension funds which have no relationship to the industrial council but which can be used to discourage workers from going on strike.<sup>17</sup>

Employers did not appreciate the 'control function' of funds until after the Second World War. They first saw them as a sly manoeuvre on the part of the unions to increase their labour costs and consequently opposed funds bitterly. Unions had to fight hard for medical benefit funds, sick pay funds or provident funds

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17. See Carole Cooper's article on the 1979 white mineworkers' strike in S.A. Labour Bulletin 5 (3) October 1979. The Chamber of Mines used the threat of depriving strikers of their benefits as a main weapon in this confrontation.

which included contributions from the employers and were administered by the industrial council. Sometimes unions decided to forego wage rises in order to secure employer partnership in the funds. Once a fund was conceded after all the battles in the industrial council meetings, the union saw this as a victory. Unions were also unaware of how severely their independence of action could be compromised by a benefit fund.

The establishment of a provident fund in the Cape garment industry illustrates some of these points. The Union first raised the demand for a provident fund in 1949. This was rejected by the CWCMA as, said the chairman, it was "a charitable institution" and "did not come within the scope of the Agreement".<sup>18</sup> The Union pressed the demand for another three years. In 1950 the employers thought that a provident fund might help to stabilize the work-force but they still refused the request.<sup>19</sup> By the end of 1951 the chairman had changed his view. He commented that,

...the Association was, to an extent, committed to the establishment of a provident fund for the Industry, and if it did agree to such a fund, it would be of immeasurable assistance when the question of a new Industrial Council Agreement had to be discussed.<sup>20</sup>

R.M. Lee, then the labour affairs secretary to the CCI, advised that if the employers,

...contributed a lump sum to start the fund...and thereby were able to ensure that the weekly contribution was kept reasonably low, it would place the employers in an advantageous position when the question of discussing a new Industrial Council Agreement with the Trade Union became due.<sup>21</sup>

The establishment of the fund was the only concession made to the Union when the Agreement came up for re-negotiation in 1952.<sup>22</sup>

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18. CWCMA Minutes: 5 September 1949 - M2.

19. CWCMA Minutes: 20 March 1950 - M2.

20. CWCMA Minutes: 17 September 1951 - M2.

21. CWCMA Minutes: 23 November 1951 - M2.

22. CWCMA Minutes: 17 November 1952 - M2. The Provident Fund was inaugurated on 5 May 1953 (CWCMA File: Labour - Wage Board 1955-6).

A proper understanding of the role of benefit funds in boss-union relations would have to be based on a thorough study of the records of the industrial council. This might also throw light on the real function of the Union in the Cape clothing industry after 1939. The Union constantly put pressure on the employers to improve wages and conditions. The seriousness with which the CWCMA viewed the Union's frequent rejection of compromises in wage negotiations suggests that the Union was not backed purely by the power of words. The Union did not deepen its representativeness amongst the workers in the 1940's or the 1950's and it is not clear where the apparent power of the Union was based. These observations underline the need for an historical study of the development of the industrial council system - it has never been a static system, it changes and adapts to every alteration in the conditions of class struggle.

...I am content to let my record in the trade union movement speak for me and permit that record to form the basis on which I am to be judged.

- Bob Stuart, 1945<sup>23</sup>

Focus on the Cape clothing industry's experience of the Wage Act (in chapters three and four) and on the two Cape campaigns (in chapters five and six) throws light on several of the hypotheses advanced in chapter two about the conditions of economic class struggle in Cape Town between 1925 and 1939. On two separate occasions the Cape clothing manufacturers engineered the organization of their workers into a trade union in order to avoid interference by the Wage Board in their industry. The whole story is an indictment of the methods of Robert Stuart and his faction of the CFLU. The four chapters together illustrate the difficulty of sustaining solid worker organization in Cape Town in the period of Stuart's dominance over the labour movement. The reasons for the weakness of worker organization and an explanation for the nature of the organization that did exist emerge clearly from the history of the two campaigns.

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23. 'A Reply to and an Exposure of the Distortions, Misstatements and Methods of Solly Sachs', 1945 pamphlet (GWUSA Archives).

The basic aims of both campaigns was to raise wages in Cape clothing factories. In this, the first campaign failed and the second succeeded. But the broader aims of the Transvaal union's activities involved strategies for the organization of the Cape garment workers into a more militant union and the eventual formation of a national garment workers' union incorporating the three existing registered unions in the Cape, the Transvaal and Natal. On both these counts the campaigns failed. The last two chapters have stressed the tactical errors made by Sachs - for example, pressing on with the 1931 campaign despite the severe economic depression, or prematurely withdrawing support from the SAGWU in 1937. But behind misjudgements such as these, stand elements which are fundamental to the defeat of both campaigns - the dominance of the Stuart Machine inside the GWU-CP and the CFLU, the alliance between the CCI and leading elements of the CFLU, the partiality of the Department of Labour to the Cape Union and, finally, the harassment by the police.

This thesis argues that the Stuart Machine and the boss-union alliance are based in the class struggle. Both are closely linked to one another in that they both drew strength from the industrial legislation of the 1920's. This legislation, while it applied to the whole of South Africa, had effects in Cape Town which were the result of specific conditions of class struggle.

The Stuart Machine controlled trade unions. Its key figure was, of course, Stuart himself, the father, the architect, the dictator of the unions which were revived or created in Cape Town in the wake of the Industrial Conciliation and Wage Acts. The temple of the Stuart Machine until the late 1930's was the Cape Federation of Labour Unions. Associated with Stuart were stalwarts such as Evans, Poole and Freestone who served as the secretaries, administrators and officials of unions. The Stuart Machine controlled the minute books, finances and records of the unions. It administered the union constitution, it wrote and received all correspondence, it kept close ties with the Department of Labour - and with the employers.

Each union had an executive committee which included workers in the industry concerned. These workers might even be elected by their workmates, but more often they were chosen by the Stuart Machine as representatives. The tendency was for Stuart or his

close associates to steer the union with the connivance and understanding of the executive if this was convenient or without it if it was not convenient. Official positions in Stuart's unions were often held by people not engaged in the industry but deemed suitable by reason of their experience in other unions. Between 1928 and 1934 the GWU-CP appears not to have held executive meetings (and certainly held no executive elections) yet the Union officials negotiated with the bosses in its name and prevented its de-registration by the Department of Labour. When a union executive was a real and not fictitious body and resisted following the wishes of the Stuart Machine, the Machine was often able to counter the resistance by virtue of the controls it exercised over the union's administration.<sup>24</sup> Individuals or even groups of individual executive members who opposed Stuart's designs could be expelled from the union.<sup>25</sup> If this did not bring them to their senses, the employers could be approached to arrange their dismissal.<sup>26</sup> The Stuart Machine did not exist in all its characteristics from the start. These were attributes it acquired slowly. Even then not all subterfuges were successful. In 1928 garment workers on the GWU-CP executive were able to call a meeting without Stuart's approval and pass a resolution criticising his actions in agreeing to a wage scale with the employers which was lower than that proposed by the Wage Board.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-1930's the Stuart Machine had gained sufficient strength and experience to prevent workers from expressing their opposition to a second, similar attempt to foist on them a low-wage industrial council agreement.

The Stuart Machine offered its most loyal supporters employment as union officials or industrial council agents. It made its creator the leader of the Cape labour movement. Its conditions for survival as the dominant element in the CFLU were the goodwill of the employers, dictatorial control over the unions and preserv-

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24. See, for example, p.341/2, above.

25. As was Rose Crawford, for example. See p.333, above.

26. As was David Lunn. See p.344, above.

27. See p.177, above.

ing the isolation of Cape Town from the rest of the South African labour movement. Through the 1930's, the last two elements were challenged successfully. The Stuart Machine retreated into individual unions, of which the GWU-CP was the most important.

The Stuart Machine arose out of the conditions of class struggle in Cape Town in the mid 1920's. It was able to control the unions spawned by the industrial legislation precisely because they were spawned by the industrial legislation and were not the product of working class struggles in Cape Town.<sup>28</sup> From the start few unions had any base amongst organized workers. The employers encouraged their workers to join unions after reaching an understanding with Stuart this his unions would be more reasonable than the Wage Board in wage negotiations. The industrial legislation provided the framework for this collusion. It gave Stuart the firm foothold for "trade unionism" which he had sought for since 1912 without success. The unions were destined to have a significant effect on the class struggle in Cape Town but they, in turn, were shaped by the existing (and changing) local conditions of class struggle.

These points are illustrated by an enquiry into the undemocratic character of Stuart's unions. The Stuart Machine's intolerance of worker opinion and its increasingly dictatorial nature were a product both of its short-sightedness and the backwardness of Cape Town industry. The Stuart Machine was greatly influenced by the earlier history of the CFLU. Most of the CFLU unions were craft unions. Stuart himself was a stone mason and his experience of trade unionism was of craft unionism. These craft unions were small, financially insecure and based on a small percentage of the workforce. They bargained with employers on the basis of the scarce skills of their members. They made use of the strike weapon only rarely and often more in desperation than in confidence of a victory. Strikes could be effective if only a few workers came out because of their skill and key positions in the labour process. This contrasts with the position of unskilled workers in industrial unions. Such workers had to rely for their power on strong organization and the ability this gave them to withhold

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28. See Chapter Two, above.

their labour and to prevent other workers from scabbing.

Chapter four suggested<sup>29</sup> that the CFLU never really made the transition from the craft form of unionism to industrial unionism. Instead it applied the methods of craft unionism to the industrial unions they formed. It attempted always to solve disputes by negotiation without having any regard for the unity or extent of organization of the workers. In the case of a craft union, unity was easier to achieve since there were relatively few workers and their skills gave them an additional power. An industrial union draws its strength only from the unity of its members. An industrial union, such as a garment workers' union, could only be successful in a challenge to the employers if it was strongly organized. The CFLU was never confronted with a need to adopt the strategies appropriate to industrial unionism. It saw no need to abandon the time-proven behaviour characteristic of craft unions.

There were three reasons for the prevalence of this attitude. The basic reason relates to the backwardness of Cape industry in general. Most industry was small and competitive. It was oriented to consumer industries (such as food and clothing) and branches of industry that serviced existing enterprises and the transport sector. There was no significant process of deskilling in Cape Town industry, no great transition from manufacture to machinofacture. Craft unionists in Cape Town did not experience the challenge from semi-skilled operatives that broadened trade unionism in the industrialized countries from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There never was a need to extend trade union membership to the less-skilled workers in Cape Town.

Secondly, the backwardness of industry and competitive vulnerability of the few factories that did exist ensured an original weakness in the structural position of the working class in Cape Town. There was no tradition of organization among workers that would enable them to question the mode of operation of the CFLU. The garment workers were the only substantial group of less skilled workers to be organized. Their unionization did not (as in the Transvaal) grow out of the threat of factory clothing production

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29. See p. 193, above.

to organized tailors but out of the desire of factory owners to avoid the Wage Board.

Thirdly, the CFLU did not need to fashion strong industrial organization to confront the employers. The employers were happy to recognize unions. From the start they assisted unions to recruit members and they made stop order facilities available to collect subscriptions. This attitude led to the creation of unions that were formally industrial unions but were not organized as such.

The characteristics of craft unionism were naturally distorted in their extension to industrial unions. The constitutions of Stuart's unions were, to begin with, supremely democratic. They clearly show their origins in craft unionism. All important matters had to be decided at a general meeting of members. Until 1936, for example, the GWU-CP constitution required such general meetings every month and allowed only 20 members to demand a special general meeting to discuss and decide on any issue. This system was totally unwieldy once more than 200 or so workers belonged to a union. The CFLU did not change constitutions, they merely ignored them. The Stuart Machine ran the unions. Because of the lack of real organizational structures in the unions, the Machine found it impossible to cope with any worker assertiveness. It responded by trying to kill it. The Stuart Machine operated as if it alone could secure benefits for the workers. The function of workers was to sign their stop orders and praise their negotiators. It is not surprising that Stuart so often found workers ungrateful for his exertions. When the Stuart Machine was attacked as sell-outs or as undemocratic it responded with invective on the one hand and victimization on the other. It became still more dictatorial through the 1930's in response to the real organization of workers in unions set up by the Cape Districts' Committee of the TLC. Once this alternative style of trade unionism spread in Cape Town, the days of the Stuart Machine as the controller of the CFLU were numbered. Even so it was not rooted out completely. It lived on in the Western Province and District Council of Trade Unions and in the GWU-CP.

The mainstay of the Stuart Machine was its alliance with the Cape manufacturers. This alliance between the CFLU and the



CCI was the basis for the first real growth of the trade union movement in Cape Town. The CFLU had no need to adopt a form of unionism suited to confront the factory owners. An (unwritten) guarantee of non-confrontation was the reason for the new existence of the CFLU after 1925. Stuart effectively agreed to collaborate with the bosses in forming trade unions in order to resist attempts to raise wages in the Cape.

The pressure to raise wages came from the state, not, in the first instance, from the Cape Town working class. The Pact government was concerned that low wages in industry were a cause of the 'poor white problem'. Cape Town was a low wage area compared with the Transvaal on account of the backwardness of its industry and the organizational weakness of its working class. Its industry was bound to be affected by the new government policy. The CFLU shared the belief of the CCI that if wages in the Cape were raised, local factories would become uncompetitive. Work would go to the Transvaal where wages were already higher. Cape workers would lose their jobs, Cape manufacturers would be faced with extinction. The CFLU combined with the bosses to keep wages low and to keep jobs in Cape Town. As individuals CFLU officials gained an enormous amount from the alliance. For the first time they led financially viable trade unions and had regularly paying, high status employment as secretaries and union officials.

Both the means of colluding and of avoiding the Wage Board were provided in the Industrial Conciliation Act. Unions were created, stop orders signed and agreements hastily negotiated. In the garment industry, the first attempt to avoid the Wage Board failed. This was not due to a failure of the alliance to find common ground. The alliance held firm even after garment workers rejected its ploys to keep their wages low. After the close collaboration between Stuart and the CWCMA between 1925 and 1928, it was natural for them to seek one another's aid in defeating the Transvaal's organizing efforts in 1930-1 and 1934-8. Stuart and Evans saw their chance of using the manufacturers' fear of Sachs to lever them into an industrial council agreement. As Stuart's hold over older CFLU unions weakened he saw a tempting prize in a new union of garment workers. This was the fastest growing industry in Cape Town and was shortly to become the largest

employer of labour. The alliance between the CFLU and the CWCMA ensured that this would be a trade union of industrial workers which used the methods of craft unionism but would neither be united to protect the workers' interests nor combined to injure those of the bosses.<sup>30</sup>

The manufacturers in the CCI entered the alliance with the CFLU as proper profit-maximizing capitalists intent on resisting all outside interference in their industries. They united and entered the alliance to defend and advance their class interests. An argument of this thesis, drawing on detailed accounts of the relationship between the CFLU and employers in the garment industry, has been that Stuart and his associates embraced the alliance to defend and advance their personal interests.

These statements are not to be taken as indicating a conspiracy theory of class struggle in Cape Town. The alliance was, in its composition and functioning, filled with contradictions. The actions of Stuart and his associates arose out of particular conditions of class struggle in Cape Town and out of particular beliefs about trade unionism, about racial discrimination and about Cape Town. Once formed, the alliance acquired a dynamic all of its own. The clothing manufacturers were as surprised in 1939 to find themselves bound into a yearly fuss of wage negotiations as Stuart was to hear himself vilified at trade union meetings as a bosses' sell out. One cannot doubt the sincerity of his belief that he spent his life fighting for the bottom dog. One can understand the respect in which his name is still held amongst his colleagues in the GWU-CP. But Robert Stuart can never be held up as an exemplary workers' leader.

The garment industry provides both the best example of the Stuart Machine and the boss-union alliance and the most extreme suggestion of its content and importance. Future researchers on Cape Town labour history before World War II may well find it necessary to contest the claims made in this thesis about the importance of Robert Stuart and W.J. Laite; of the CFLU and the CCI in the class struggle in Cape Town. But there can be no doubt of their centrality in the history of the Cape garment workers.

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30. "United to protect, but not combined to injure" was a common motto of early craft unions in England (Musson, 1972, p.54).

This thesis has placed stress on the differences, at many levels, between the class struggle in Cape Town and in the rest of South Africa. It has placed emphasis on how local history can only be understood in the context of local conditions of class struggle. This approach has been useful, particularly in the analysis of the operation of the industrial laws of the 1920's; for the mechanism of the laws is most clearly seen in a regional study and in regional comparisons. An emphasis on the local dynamic of class struggle is also necessary to the interpretation of the forms taken by organization and conflict in Cape Town. But the history of class struggle in South Africa cannot only be a series of regional histories.

The history of the Cape garment workers is tightly interwoven with that of garment workers in the Transvaal. The level of organization of garment workers in Cape Town, the success or failure of their struggles for higher wages, ultimately set limits on what was achievable by workers in the Transvaal. The lack of a nationally organized and united garment workers' union was an important factor which undermined garment worker organization and wages on the Witwatersrand in the 1950's. The campaigns of the Transvaal union in Cape Town were responsible for awakening the Cape Garment Workers' Union and for stimulating the alliance between the manufacturers' association and the Union officials. In other industries too, conditions in the Cape Town 'periphery' influenced struggles in the Transvaal 'centre' - this fact underlay the concerted and lengthy attempts to incorporate the Cape trade union movement with that of the north. But class struggles in all regions are linked at least by the relationship all have to the South African state.

This raises the problem of how to conceptualise 'the class struggle' in South Africa when forms of organization are, and always have been, predominantly regional. In general, this problem is downplayed by the cartographers of class struggle in South Africa. National capital, national bourgeoisie, agricultural capital, merchant capital and manufacturing capital are uncompromisingly 'non-regional' concepts. Their use creates an (often misleading) impression of national applicability. Yet much of the analysis that uses these concepts has a strong regional bias -

to the Witwatersrand. For 'mining capital' is a regional concept - if by default. The flaw in this analysis is not that it is regional but rather that assertions about the path of national class struggle are drawn too easily from regional struggles. There needs to be a greater consciousness of interlinkages between essentially regional struggles, rather than a promotion only of the 'main' battlefields of class struggle.

The forging of effective national unity in political and economic struggle has always been seen as an essential requirement for change in South Africa. An organized national unity in action is exceptionally hard to achieve between regions having different forms of organization and subject to locally distinct rhythms of class struggle. An historical understanding of regional organization and struggles lays bare the differences between regions. Unity is not a South Africa tradition. It cannot be conjured into existence. It has to be planned and slowly constructed. Local history studies will not solve the problem, but they can open a constructive debate to identify the strongest bases for nation-wide co-operation and unity today.

Appendix A: Wage disparities between the Cape Town and Witwatersrand clothing industries 1925-1939

The difference in wages between the clothing industries in Cape Town and the Transvaal was the proximate cause of thirty years of conflict between the Garment Workers' Union of the Cape Peninsula and the Transvaal-based Garment Workers' Union of South Africa. This Appendix analyses the extent and effects of the wage gap from 1925 up to the end of the period covered by the thesis and evaluates the reasons raised at the time to explain the wage disparity.

CONTENTS

- 1 Estimating the extent of the wage differential.
- 2 The effects of the wage differential.
- 3 Reasons for the differential.
- 4 Discussion.
- 5 Blame it on the Board - a comment on Barker (1962).

1 Estimating the extent of the wage differential

...for more than a decade wages (in the clothing industry) on the Rand have been some 20 per cent higher than at the coast.

- Wage Board Report, 1938

This generalization is useful as an indication of the continuity and considerable extent of the wage differential between the Cape and Witwatersrand clothing industries. However it is impossible adequately to trace the true extent of the differential over the period 1925 to 1939. This is largely because of a lack of reliable or sufficiently detailed statistics but also because the structure of the industries in the two centres was not identical. The classification of jobs and learnership periods differed. Work that was done by higher paid workers in one centre might be done by lower paid workers in another. This was the case, for example, with pressing. This heavy work was done by men in all clothing factories, but the men in the Transvaal factories were all Africans,

whose wages, except between 1934 and 1936, were substantially below those paid in the Cape.<sup>1</sup>

Average wages, for all workers engaged in the production of clothing in factories, were calculated by the Wage Board from time to time.<sup>2</sup> These statistics all indicated that average wages in the Transvaal were greater than those in the Cape. They cannot, however, even as averages, be taken as accurate figures because they were calculated only from returns submitted to the Wage Board and not from a systematic census of the whole industry. In addition it is possible that manufacturers gave incorrect information so as not to raise suspicions that they were not complying with the wage determinations or agreements.

Table A.1: Average Wages of Cape and Transvaal Clothing Workers<sup>3</sup>

Year	Cape Town	Witwatersrand	Wage Gap Index (Cape = 100)
1929 <sup>a*</sup>	£1.12. 8	£1.14.10	107
1931 <sup>a*</sup>	£1.13. 2	£1.17. 8	114
1936 <sup>a*</sup>	£1.13.11	£1.19. 5	116
1938 <sup>b**</sup>	£85,3	£100,6	118

\* Weekly Earnings

\*\* Annual Earnings

1. The wages of African men in the Transvaal clothing industry were not regulated by industrial council agreements until the 1950's. No minimum wage was in force until 1932 when Wage Determination No.42, which ruled in Cape Town as well, was made applicable to African men (non-"employees" under the definition in the Industrial Conciliation Act) in the Transvaal clothing industry. Cape wages rose above the level set in Determination No.42 in 1936. The minimum basic wage of African male workers in the Transvaal was not raised until 1944 when a new wage determination (No.120) was made for this specific purpose.
2. The Industrial Census reports do not distinguish between wholesale factory production of clothing and retail bespoke tailoring. Class VI in the Census reports also includes laundries and dry cleaners.
3. Sources: a) Tables 6.3 and 6.4, above.  
b) Report 303 of the Board of Trade and Industries (1947).

A more continuous picture of the wage differential is obtained by tracing the minimum wages prescribed for female machinists in the two areas. In the period before 1939, these workers made up over half of the workforce in both Cape Town and on the Witwatersrand.<sup>4</sup> The graph and table below are presented as an indicator of changes in the size of the wage differential and of its extent but they are not totally adequate for this task. They reflect the minimum wages of qualified female machinists. The wage structure in the clothing industry allowed for a long learnership period for all workers. The ratio of learners to qualified workers set in the agreements or determinations was not the same in the Cape and Transvaal. There are strong indications<sup>5</sup> that it was common practice in the Cape to dismiss workers before they were entitled to the qualified wage and to replace them with beginners. The ratio provisions were constantly ignored. Many employers were able to pay wages below those set by law because of a lack of efficient enforcement. (Enforcement in the Transvaal was better than in Cape Town, but remained unsatisfactory until about 1936.)

## 2 The effects of the wage differential

The 'unfair' competition of the coastal towns with the Rand because of their lower wage structure, has been a source of perennial complaint by Transvaal (clothing) manufacturers since 1926.

- Wage Board Report, 1956 (cited in Barker, 1962, p.395)

The wage disparity between the Cape and Transvaal clothing industries had enormous effects in Cape Town. The wage disparity attracted the attention of the Wage Board in 1926. It was the main reason

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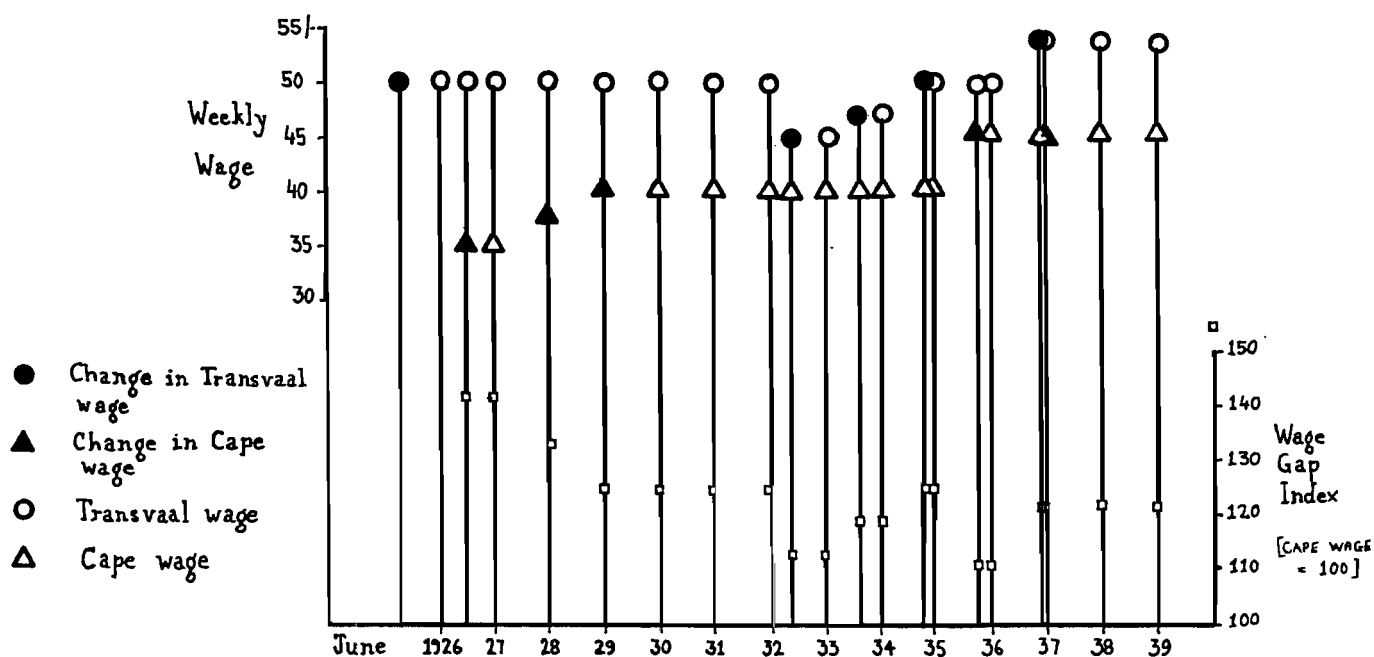
4. In March 1936, 61,4% of Transvaal garment workers were machinists compared with 59,3% in Cape Town. 95% of these machinists were women. (Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938 - Tables II and IV.) In the Transvaal the minimum wage set for qualified women machinists was £2.10.0 a week while the average wage for machinists was £1.19.2. In Cape Town, the figures were £2 (minimum) and £1.12.1 (average). The Transvaal average wage was thus 22% above the Cape average wage and the Transvaal minimum qualified wage 25% above that of the Cape. The difference in minimum qualified wages appears to be a reasonable indicator of the difference in the average wages paid to qualified female machinists in the Cape and Transvaal.

5. See Chapter 4, above.

Table A.2: Changes in the minimum starting and qualified wages of female machinists 1925-1939 (shillings)

Govt. Notice Number	Date	Regulation	WITWATERSRAND			CAPE TOWN			Wage Gap Index (Cape=100)
			Learner-ship period (months)	Starting Wage	Qualified Wage	Learner-ship period (months)	Starting Wage	Qualified Wage	
1514	11 Sep 1925	Agreement	30	20/-	50/-				
2186	3 Dec 1926	Wage Det. 2				36	10/-	35/-	142
939	8 Jun 1928	Wage Det. 15				36	15/-	37/6	133
-	Jun 1929	Wage Det. 15				36	15/-	40/-	125
1362	14 Oct 1932	Arbitration	30	18/-	45/-				113
174	16 Feb 1934	Agreement	30	19/-	47/6				119
528	18 Apr 1935	Agreement	36	20/-	50/-				125
457	3 Mar 1936	Agreement				36	18/-	45/-	111
787	21 May 1937	Agreement	36	20/-	55/-				122

Graph A.1: Minimum qualified wages of female machinists 1925-1939





behind the efforts of the Wage Board to increase coastal wages. It was also the reason for the campaigns of worker organization in Cape Town directed and sponsored by the Transvaal garment workers' union.

Conversely, the low wage competition from the Cape also affected the Transvaal clothing industry. The low coastal wages threatened the efforts of workers and factory owners to establish "good conditions of employment" on the Witwatersrand.<sup>6</sup> This is illustrated most starkly in the period 1931 to 1932. The loss of government contracts to Cape Town prompted the Transvaal employers to take desperate steps to cut wages. There were two general strikes in the industry before workers' wages in the Transvaal were cut by 10 per cent. The arbitrator in the dispute accepted the argument that the Transvaal factories were being undercut by competition from the coast because of the low levels of coastal wages.

One can acknowledge the crucial role the wage differential had in shaping worker and employer organization and on stimulating changes in wage determinations and industrial agreements while still questioning the real effects of the wage differential on the location and growth of the industry. For although in general minimum and average wage levels were higher on the Witwatersrand, the industry there had a much faster pace of growth than that on the coast. As the Wage Board commented in 1938, while explaining its refusal to set a uniform wage scale for the whole country based on the Transvaal standards:

...for more than a decade wages on the Rand have been some 20 per cent higher than at the coast and during that period the industry has prospered and expanded to a greater extent than have its coastal competitors.<sup>7</sup>

The number of workers in the Transvaal industry increased by 232% over the period 1929 to 1938 while in Cape Town employment increased by 186%.<sup>8</sup>

But, a comparison of the growth of the Cape and Transvaal clothing industries over the period 1925 to 1938, hides an important

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6. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927, paragraph 11.

7. Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938.

8. Calculated from Tables 6.3 and 6.4, above.

feature of the Transvaal's spectacular growth. This growth was most rapid after the Great Depression and the 1932 cut in wages. In the preceding four years the Transvaal lost contracts to Cape factories. Between 1929 and 1931 the Cape Town clothing industry outpaced that of the Transvaal in employment growth. The number of workers in Cape Town was 32 per cent greater in 1931 than in 1929 while for the Witwatersrand the figure was 13 per cent. In the period after the depression, employment growth in the Transvaal leapt ahead to be 135 per cent greater in 1936 than in 1931, as compared to 59 per cent in the case of Cape Town.<sup>9</sup>

In view of the enormous expansion of the Transvaal clothing industry after the depression and the fact that it surpassed the rate of growth in employment in the Cape Town industry, it is hard to sustain the perennial complaints of Transvaal manufacturers that they were in reality confronted with 'unfair' competition from the Cape after 1932 or 1933. Unfair competition, it must be noted, was partly removed by the successful efforts of the Transvaal garment workers' union to stimulate a rise in the wage level in Cape Town. But even if the 'unfair' element of Cape competition did disappear or was rendered irrelevant in the late 1930's, the existence of lower wage levels in the Cape presented an obvious potential threat to the future prosperity of the Transvaal industry. There was no wage regulating machinery or market force to guarantee that wage costs in the two areas would adjust to permit continued growth in both areas in the future. For twenty years after 1936, the fears of the Transvaal manufacturers and worker leaders that the lower wage levels in the Cape would decisively undermine the wage standards and expansion of clothing industry in the Transvaal proved groundless. These fears, however, had most important effects. They motivated a constant and, at times, obsessive effort of the Transvaal union to form a single nation-wide union of garment workers to fight for wage-uniformity based on the standards of the Transvaal. The fears of low-wage competition inspired numerous joint efforts of the Transvaal union and employers' association to form a national co-ordinating body

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9. Between 1936 and 1938 the Transvaal industry showed a growth in employment of 24% compared with 20% for Cape Town. All percentages were calculated from Tables 6.3 and 6.4, above.

for the industry. Finally, in the mid-1950's, the fears were realised. The Transvaal industry began to shrink as firms went bankrupt or relocated in low-wage areas. The Transvaal union launched its last and most desperate campaign in Cape Town to organize Cape workers to demand parity with Transvaal wages. The campaign lasted for two years but failed utterly. In 1956 wage levels in the Transvaal industry were cut drastically. New entrants to the industry, now mainly black women, received wages as low as those on the coast. Within five years the wage disparity between the Cape and Transvaal was all but eliminated. The disappearance of the wage gap removed the cause of a thirty-year long, bitter conflict between the two largest garment workers' unions in the country.

### 3 Reasons for the differential

Several reasons or justifications for the persistence of the wage disparity between the inland and coastal sections of the clothing industry were current in the period under discussion. These were of three basic types, none of which excludes the others. The first asserts that the Cape and Transvaal clothing factories produced for different parts of the market for clothing. They did not compete directly with one another and thus low wages in Cape Town did not interfere directly with the profitability of industry in the Transvaal or with the existence of higher wage levels. The second relates the wage disparity to the distance of Cape Town from the main markets of South Africa and the additional costs of transporting finished goods to their place of final sale. The third type of reason seeks an explanation for the wage disparity in differences in the labour markets between Cape Town and the Witwatersrand.

#### 3.1 Production for different parts of the market

This explanation is unquestionably relevant to the shirt and pyjama branch of the clothing industry. Shirt and pyjama production was only undertaken on any scale after 1925. Wages in this branch of the industry in Britain were specially low and local manufacturers could only compete once shirting was imported free of duty. It was formerly subject to the same customs duty as

made-up garments.<sup>10</sup> The shirt and pyjama industry was concentrated in Cape Town. In 1935 the shirt industry in Johannesburg was described as "exceptionally small as compared with the Cape".<sup>11</sup> In the same year the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association told the Customs Tariff Commission that,

The disparity in wages is so great that it does not give us a chance to establish a shirt factory, so all that business goes to the coast.<sup>12</sup>

The industry in Cape Town was forced to keep wages low by overseas competition, specially from the United States and Britain.<sup>13</sup> The Cape shirt and pyjama manufacturers constantly stated that wages paid in the shirt industry in Britain were lower than in South Africa.<sup>14</sup>

In the mid-1930's, when the Wage Board, encouraged by the clothing industry in the Transvaal, indicated an intention of again raising wages in its determination for Cape Town, the shirt manufacturers decided to split away from the clothing industry and apply for their own separate wage determination.<sup>15</sup> This would have lower wages and workers who had experience in other clothing factories would start at beginners' wages if they moved to shirt factories.<sup>16</sup> At a meeting of the CWCMA in 1935, Edgar Jacobs said that the wage structure and the regulations in the wage determination were framed on conditions in the ready-made clothing industry.

[He] stated that shirt manufacturers' conditions were not the same as in the Clothing Industry. The competition to be met by the Clothing Industry was from the

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10. Board of Trade and Industries Report 28b - The Duty on Shirt-ing (Annexure 537 - 1925).
  11. CWCMA Minutes: 26 March 1935 (Shirt Section) - M2/1.
  12. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, p.707.
  13. CWCMA Minutes: 23 September 1937; 4 November 1938 - M2/1.
  14. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence, pp.3494, 3497; CWCMA Minutes: 4 November 1938.
  15. Some clothing factories produced shirts too, but the bulk of production came from specialized shirt factories such as the Monatic factory of Edgar Jacobs.
  16. CWCMA Minutes: 9 April 1935 - M2/1.

Rand, whereas the fiercest competition in shirts came from overseas where there were not such restrictive wage rates nor ratios. In order to meet this competition the Shirt Industry had to have either greater protection or a wage rate that would enable it to compete.<sup>17</sup>

Because the main pressure for wage increases in the Cape came from the Transvaal, the shirt manufacturers hoped that by distinguishing their branch of the industry as not competitive with the Transvaal, they might be able to avoid wage increases. The minutes of a "Shirt Section" meeting recorded:

At present the Cape shirt manufacturing industry stood in danger of being subjected to excessive wage rates which had been framed with the purpose of combating sweating and other abuses of labour prevailing in the Ready Made Clothing Industry.<sup>18</sup>

At this time the protective tariff for shirt manufacturers was slightly lower than for other clothing.<sup>19</sup> Shirt factories then employed about 2 900 out of some 4 700 workers in the Cape clothing industry.<sup>20</sup>

In other branches of clothing production there was competition between the Cape and the Transvaal but its intensity varied and it was not always direct, the Cape Town factories tending to produce higher quality goods. Competition was most intense during the 1920's and the depression over the award of government contracts.

In 1926-7, despite its higher wage standards, the Transvaal secured 89 per cent of government tendered contracts.<sup>21</sup> "Most of this work," the Wage Board commented, "had previously been done in the Cape." The Board said this indicated the relative inefficiency of the Cape clothing industry.<sup>22</sup> But three years

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17. CWCMA Minutes: 15 April 1935 - M2/1.

18. CWCMA Minutes: 26 March 1935 (Shirt Section) - M2/1.

19. CWCMA Minutes: 9 April 1935 - M2/1.

20. CWCMA Minutes: 15 April 1935 - M2/1.

21. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927, paragraph 39.

22. Ibid.

later the trade union in the Transvaal complained that government contracts were being lost to the Cape. The union maintained,

...that the work was lost to Johannesburg and Pretoria firms because of undercutting by the Cape.<sup>23</sup>

By 1931 the Cape secured 25 government contracts, compared with the Transvaal's eleven and three awarded elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> This led to a crisis in the Transvaal clothing industry. The employers put pressure on the union to agree to a cut in wages. One informant stated that Solly Sachs' encouragement of the strike at African Clothing in 1931 was an effort to sow discord in the Cape clothing industry and so sabotage the fulfilment of contracts given to Cape factories.<sup>25</sup> This effort (if it was so directed) failed completely. The garment workers' union in the Transvaal was drawn into an intense battle with the employers that culminated in the defeat of the union and a ten per cent cut in wages.

Apart from government contract work (which assumed a special importance during the depression when much other production ceased), direct competitive clashes between the Cape Town and Witwatersrand clothing industries are not obvious. A substantial proportion of the output of Cape clothing factories went to supply country stores with "better class" clothing including wholesale bespoke suits. A CWCMA meeting noted that because of the variety of orders manufacturers had to fulfil when catering to "the higher class of customer (including merchants)" they needed to keep a large stock and range of high class material.<sup>26</sup> Transvaal firms, on the other hand, "catered for standard lines and were in the majority of cases interested in mass production" for the "tremendous market at their door".<sup>27</sup> In addition to the costs of keeping large stocks of expensive material, Cape manufacturers had to spend more than their counterparts in the Transvaal in promoting their wares. A 1931 Wage Board report recorded that Cape firms spent 7,6 per cent of their turnover on the salaries, commissions and expenses

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23. Cape Times 20 December 1929.

24. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931.

25. Interview with David Lunn.

26. CWCMA Minutes: 12 October 1931 - M2/1.

27. Ibid.

of travelling salesmen as compared with the 3,9 per cent of Transvaal firms.<sup>28</sup>

After the depression the Transvaal industry expanded its range of output. The TCMA told the Customs Tariff Commission in 1935 that until a few years previously they were making clothes "for natives and for native mine-workers" and were not making the "better class" of clothing. But since then they had begun to produce mens' outer garments (but not shirts or pyjamas) that were "on the level" with the best goods produced in South Africa.<sup>29</sup> By the late 1930's, about two thirds of South African-manufactured ready-made suits and outer garments were produced on the Witwatersrand.<sup>30</sup> Transvaal manufacturers competed successfully on the local market in Cape Town.<sup>31</sup> One member of the CWCMA,

...was of the opinion that the Transvaal manufacturers 'got away with' anything they made. It was a known fact that they did not pay the same careful attention to detail in the production of articles as was done at the Cape.<sup>32</sup>

It is ironical that in the clothing industry the workers producing the lower class goods should get paid the higher wages. Cape manufacturers maintained that the Transvaal could pay higher wages because they got a higher "output per worker".<sup>33</sup> This was made possible by there being no need to pay careful attention to detail in producing lower class goods. This argument is not necessarily valid. It is not clear whether the greater "output per worker" was related to volume or value. The Transvaal may have produced a greater number of garments per worker each day than the Cape, but the value added per worker was not therefore greater. The fact of a greater output per worker in this sense cannot alone explain higher wages. The contention that the amount of value added by each worker every day was greater in the Transvaal might be inferred from a remark made at a CWCMA meeting which discussed

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28. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931 paragraph 4.

29. Customs Tariff Commission: Minutes of Evidence p.707.

30. Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938 p.39.

31. CWCMA Minutes: 23 September 1937.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

the allegations that Cape manufacturers were employing sweated labour to undercut Transvaal manufacturers.

Mr. Roytowski gave instances of 'efficiency drives' which he had witnessed in Transvaal factories where supervisors kept the girls working at top speed all day long and where an employee was discharged on the slightest indication of slowness.<sup>34</sup>

This statement might be the basis for an argument that the intensity of labour in the Transvaal was greater than in the Cape, that the rationalization of the labour process was more advanced and/or that the level of mechanization was greater. If any one of these conditions held it might explain how the Transvaal could sustain its higher level of wages. It is extremely difficult to test this argument. Neither in Cape Town nor in Johannesburg was there a standard labour process or common level of mechanization. It is a characteristic of the clothing industry that advanced and backward methods of production can exist side by side and that "slave-driving" and "sweating" are common to both.<sup>35</sup> Comparison is further complicated by the fact that the output of the clothing factories was directed at different parts of the market and the labour process involved in the production of better class goods was different from that involved in producing longer runs of simple, lower class clothing. All the evidence surveyed for this thesis suggests that the "better" Cape manufacturers used the most efficient and modern methods available for the type of production they were engaged in.<sup>36</sup> Joanna Cornelius would have contradicted Roytowski's remark above. In 1936 she worked in his factory. Later she wrote:

The speeding-up at the African Clothing Manufacturers was much greater than in Johannesburg. One could not say a word there. The foreman was constantly watching the workers and I saw on many occasions workers being

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34. CWCMA Minutes: 30 January 1935 - M2/1.

35. See, for example, Garment Workers' Union: Memorandum submitted to the Industrial Legislation Commission, September 1934, pp.19-20.

36. See Chapter 4, p.211.



offensively abused, slapped in the face and chased out of work for the most trivial matters.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, 1) Low wages in Cape Town shirt factories did not adversely affect the Transvaal clothing industry as very few shirts were produced in the Transvaal. 2) The wage disparity in other branches of clothing manufacture did affect the Transvaal. Under-cutting by the Cape deprived the Transvaal of government contracts and occasioned the need for wage reductions in the Transvaal during the depression. 3) The effects of the wage disparity were lessened to an extent by the Cape Town and Witwatersrand factories producing different classes of clothing for different parts of the market. This regional specialization became less marked after the depression. Its precise effects and its extent are difficult to estimate.

### 3.2 Locational disadvantages of Cape Town

A constantly expressed justification for the difference in wage rates between Transvaal and Cape Town clothing factories was that Cape manufacturers had to absorb heavy railage dues in order to compete on the Rand - the main market for clothing.<sup>38</sup> Transvaal manufacturers had to pay for the transport of raw materials from the coast but the railage on raw materials was lower than for finished goods. Also,

...there was the fact that railage dues from Durban to Johannesburg were very much less than those from Capetown to Johannesburg, while the extra freightage between Cape Town and Durban was negligible.<sup>39</sup>

Edgar Jacobs stated that,

...their main argument as to why the Cape was entitled to pay lower wages than the Transvaal was that the local manufacturers were situated a considerable distance away from the principle market of the Union. In his opinion it was therefore a reasonable claim that the Cape wages

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37. Statement of Joanna Cornelius n.d. (GWUSA Archives).

38. CWCMA Minutes: 30 January 1935 - M2/1.

39. CWCMA Minutes: 26 March 1935 - M2/1.

should be at least 10% lower than those in operation in the North.<sup>40</sup>

In 1938 the CWCMA drafted a list of,

...reasons why it was considered fair and reasonable for the Cape to pay females 45/- per week as against 55/- per week in the Tansvaal.<sup>41</sup>

The first point in this list was that,

The Cape was situated about 1,000 miles away from the main market of the Union, and at least 50% of the goods manufactured in the Cape had to be sold on that market. The Cape manufacturers were at a decided disadvantage as their competitors' factories were situated right next door, as it were, to such a market. Such competitors could give much quicker delivery.<sup>42</sup>

A proper evaluation of the argument that the Cape deserved a 10 or 20 per cent advantage in wage rates to compensate it for its locational disadvantages would be a mammoth undertaking. It would require a study of the distribution of clothing between the markets on the Rand and at the coast in the context of railway rates before World War II. However, one is inclined to dismiss the argument that locational disadvantages can explain a substantial part of the wage differential in the light of Barker's comments on the subject. Barker (1962, pp.110-118) discussed at length the influence of transport costs on the location of the South African clothing industry. He stated that,

...distribution transport costs do not constitute a very significant proportion of the total cost of clothing manufacture.

In support of this he cited a Board of Trade and Industries report of 1945 that,

'in the case of light valuable goods such as cigarettes, shoes or clothing, the costs of movement

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40. CWCMA Minutes: 23 September 1937 - M2/1.

41. CWCMA Minutes: 4 November 1938 - M2/1.

42. Ibid.

from the centre of production to the centre of consumption may be almost negligible.<sup>43</sup>

Barker (1962, p.111) calculated that in 1946/7 the costs of transporting finished garments were 0,55 per cent of sales' value for Western Cape factories as compared with 0,20 per cent for Transvaal factories. Although all Barker's comments related to a period after that investigated here and are not specifically directed at explaining the wage differential, they all tend to contradict the arguments advanced by the Cape manufacturers. Transport costs are unlikely to have been a valid justification for the wage differential.

### 3.3 Regional labour markets

Most explanations for the lower wages paid in the Cape garment industry amounted to assertions that they were based on conditions in the local labour market. Some of these explanations stressed differences between the labour markets of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand that were specific to the supply of clothing workers. Others saw the wage disparity in the clothing industry as just one instance of a general disparity in wages over the whole range of industry between the Cape and the Transvaal. It is not necessarily useful to separate these two strands of argument, and no systematic attempt is made below. But it is necessary to see the wage disparity in the clothing industry in the wider context of wage differences between all Cape and Transvaal industry.

A general wage gap between all the coastal towns and the Witwatersrand was acknowledged by the Wage Board in 1926. As Table A.3 indicates, this had existed for some years previously as well. "In view of the need for a speedy determination of wages" in the industries it was then investigating,<sup>44</sup> the Board "decided to accept for the present" that a differentiation between the wage rates on the Witwatersrand and the coastal towns was justified.<sup>45</sup>

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43. Board of Trade and Industries Report 285, 29 December 1946, p.20, cited in Barker (1962, p.111).

44. Clothing, sweets, biscuits and confectionery.

45. 'General Note on Matters Common to Recommendations in Respect of a Number of Industries', Social and Industrial Review (Special Edition), September 1926, p.27.

A whole book could be written on the conflicts within the labour movement between 1925 and 1939 caused by the wage differential between the Cape and the Transvaal. It was a major reason for the Transvaal unions trying to incorporate the CFLU in the SATUC and in the SATLC. One example of the problems that emerged around the wage question is provided by the furniture industry. A national industrial council was formed in the industry in the mid-1920's. It did not function well and soon collapsed, partly because the national union of furniture workers was unable to resolve internal differences and the Cape section of the union seceded.<sup>46</sup> The reason for dissension was the wage gap in the furniture industry between the Cape and the Rand.<sup>47</sup> The branch of the union on the Rand wanted to negotiate an end to the wage disparity but could not reach agreement with the Cape branch on how this might be done. Bill Andrews accused the CFLU of co-operating with the employers to break the national industrial council and,

...to perpetuate the low wage system so that the Cape industry can compete with the North.<sup>48</sup>

Although wage disparities were a feature in many industries, in each case they had individual as well as shared causes and followed different paths of change and development.

### 3.3a The "Wage Sandwich"

There was not a straightforward wage-gap between manufacturing industry in the Cape and the Transvaal. The labour markets in the two regions had different structures. The high wages of white and skilled workers in Witwatersrand factories were balanced against the wages of African unskilled workers which were extremely low - below those paid to unskilled workers in Cape Town. As Graph A.2 and Table A.3 indicate, the average wages of white and coloured workers in Cape Town were 'sandwiched' between much higher average wages for whites in the Transvaal and much lower average wages for Africans. There were relatively few African

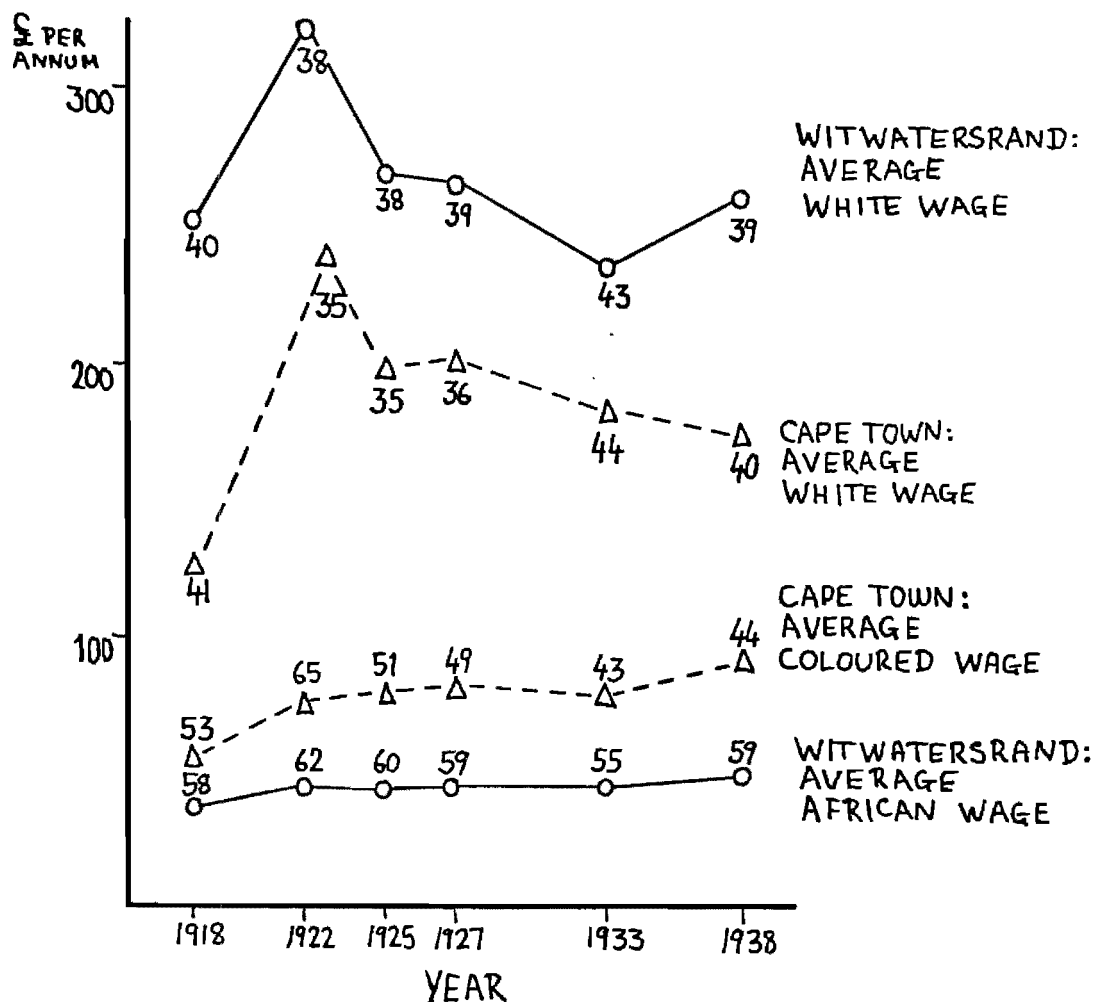
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46. Cape Times 2 November 1929.

47. Ibid.; Cape Times 25 December 1929.

48. Cape Times 21 February 1930.

Graph A.2: The Witwatersrand-Cape Town "Wage Sandwich", 1917-1938  
(Manufacturing Industry)



Figures indicate the percentage of the labour force in each 'racial group'.

workers in Cape Town. Their average wage, while below that of coloured workers in Cape Town, was above that of African workers on the Witwatersrand. Cape Town consistently stands out in the industrial censuses as paying higher wages to African workers on average than any other industrial area in South Africa.

A 'wage sandwich' also describes an aspect of the difference between the clothing industries of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town. Average wages of Cape garment workers fell between the higher wages of the white garment workers on the Witwatersrand and the low wages of African male pressers in the industry on the Witwatersrand. African male workers made up 23 per cent of the workforce in the Transvaal clothing factories in the late

Table A.3: Average Wage Comparison between the Witwatersrand and the Cape Peninsula

	Total no. of workers of all races	Av. wage per year (£)	'EUROPEANS'			AFRICANS			'OTHER COLOURED'		
			Average wage (£)	Number	% of total	Average wage (£)	Number	% of total	Average wage (£)	Number	% of total
<u>1917/8</u>											
Witwatersrand	33 462	126	252	13 550	40	38	19 352	58	61	380	1
Cape Peninsula	22 017	92	125	8 974	41	50	1 317	6	58	11 592	53
Union	134 211	91	181	49 918	37	33	51 870	39	54	20 110	15
<u>1921/22</u>											
Witwatersrand	53 991	147	322	20 780	38	(45)*	(33 211)	(62)			
Cape Peninsula	31 472	129	239	11 093	35				(73)*	(20 379)	(65)
Union	170 951	122	270	59 995	35	(48)*	(110 956)	(65)			
<u>1924/25**</u>											
Southern Transvaal	51 695	125	268	19 406	38	44	30 935	60	72	1 130	2
Western Cape	27 625	113	199	9 626	35	53	3 814	14	76	13 966	51
Union	152 747	107	226	53 450	35	41	66 503	44	71	23 427	15
<u>1926/27**</u>											
Southern Transvaal	58 600	127	265	22 589	39	44	34 574	59	87	1 140	2
Western Cape	31 615	120	202	11 412	36	57	4 494	14	83	15 486	49
Union	170 412	111	227	61 412	36	42	74 615	44	78	25 083	15
<u>1932/33**</u>											
Southern Transvaal	73 420	124	235	28 310	43	43	36 153	55	87	1 266	2
Western Cape	30 428	118	179	13 477	44	53	3 501	12	77	13 175	43
Union	164 790	110	203	68 981	42	40	66 751	40	73	20 762	13
<u>1937/38**</u>											
Southern Transvaal	141 029	112 <sup>+</sup>	258	54 703	39	48	83 790	59	93	2 133	2
Western Cape	48 518	102 <sup>+</sup>	171	19 271	40	63	7 919	16	93	21 914	44
Union	305 454	100 <sup>+</sup>	227	117 237	38	45	142 447	47	86	33 113	11

\* Bracketed figures are for "Other Races", a total of african, indian and coloured workers.

\*\* Statistics do not include government undertakings (eg. railway workshops) after 1924/25 - they cover "Private Industry" only.

+ These averages were calculated by dividing total employment into total wages.

Sources: Industrial Census reports: 1917/1918 UG17 - 1920, Tables 12,18  
 1921/1922 UG14 - 1924, Tables 12,8,9  
 1924/1925 UG41 - 1927, Tables 1b,6,11  
 1926/1927 UG51 - 1928, Tables 1b,11  
 1932/1933 UG31 - 1935, Tables 2,7  
 1937/1938 UG21 - 1941, Tables 3,4,10,15

Note that, except for 1921/22, the detail columns do not include employment figures for 'Indians and other Asiatics'. However the total column always includes indian workers.

1920's, 18% in the early 1930's and between about 9 and 13 per cent through the rest of the decade.<sup>49</sup> Their wages were not set by the industrial council agreement and were not subject to any minimum until 1932 when Wage Determination 42 was made applicable in the Transvaal. In 1931 most African pressers were paid 30/- a week while factories in the Cape were bound by Wage Determination 15 to pay qualified pressers between £3 and £3.15.0 a week.<sup>50</sup> The Wage Board went so far as to state,

The higher wages paid to Europeans on the Rand in comparison with those paid elsewhere are only made possible by the absence of provision for pass bearing natives in the agreement.<sup>51</sup>

Transvaal factories were assisted in their adjustment to the payment of the minimum wages set in Wage Determination 42 by the 10 per cent reduction in the wages of all white workers which also took effect in 1932.

For four years, between 1932 and 1936, the minimum wages payable to pressers was the same in Cape Town and on the Witwatersrand. After 1936, when the Cape industry began to be regulated by an industrial council agreement, Cape pressers' wages again exceeded those in the Transvaal.

The 'wage sandwich' can, at times, contribute to an explanation of how the 'high wage Transvaal' was able to compete with the 'low wage Cape'. However, neither in the clothing industry, nor in industry in general were black workers' wages in the Transvaal low enough or the proportion of black workers in the Transvaal labour force high enough to remove the overall gap in average wages between the Cape and the Transvaal. The figures in the second column of Table A.3 show that once racially specified differentials in each centre were submerged in the calculation of an overall average wage, the Cape still undercut the Transvaal. The same is true in the clothing industry, as is shown in Table A.1.

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49. See Table 6.4, above.

50. Wage Board Report, 23 October 1931, paragraph 6.

51. Ibid. This judgement on the period before 1932 was reported in the Wage Board Report of 12 April 1935, paragraph 32.

### 3.3b Attitudes and actions of the Wage Board

The competition presented by the coastal areas to the Witwatersrand and the effect this competition had on the standards of less-skilled white workers in particular, were central problems which the Wage Board attempted to resolve. The Board was only responsible for unorganized industries. It noted in 1926 that,

The rate of wages on the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria generally tends to be higher than elsewhere in the Union, partly because the employees are, as a rule, better organized than in other areas...<sup>52</sup>

In the case of the clothing industry the Board said:

One principle in the line of policy which we intend to pursue, is to see that labour is not exploited in one district to keep down the standard in another.<sup>53</sup>

As Chapter 4, above, illustrates, the Board's constant attempt from 1926 to 1935 was gradually to raise coastal wages up to Transvaal levels. This attempt was set back by the Great Depression but is clearly expressed again in the 1935 Wage Board report and recommendations. The implementation of these recommendations was not approved by the Minister of Labour, who disbanded the Board in 1935 and dismissed its long-standing chairman, Advocate F.A.W. Lucas. The new Wage Board issued a report on the garment industry which justified the existence of "two different sets of wages" on the grounds that the Transvaal industry was prospering and that,

...whatever the cause, analysis of available information tends to confirm the assertion that the standard of industrial efficiency on the Rand is higher than it is at the Cape.<sup>54</sup>

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52. 'General Note....' op.cit.

53. Wage Board Report, 25 September 1927, paragraph 36.

54. Wage Board Report, 21 February 1938, paragraph 70. The "available evidence" was largely a set of figures which showed the "average profit on turnover" to be 9,4 per cent on the Rand as against 5,4 per cent at the Coast. Lucas' Wage Board looked first at the need to improve and equalize workers' conditions. The Board of his successor, MacGregor, looked first at the need to improve and equalize profits!



Subsequently the Wage Board, although it conducted several extensive investigations into the industry over the following twenty years, never proposed any new strategy to reduce or remove the wage disparity. After 1936 all centres of clothing production were ruled by regional industrial councils which in their operation responded to regional conditions of labour supply and reinforced regional differentiation of wage rates and wage structures.

### 3.3c Lower standard of living = lower wage costs = unfair competition

Their real argument should be that they had the right to pay lower wages at the Cape in view of the fact that it was a settled principle that the cost of living in the coastal areas was cheaper than in the Transvaal.

- W.J. Laite, at a CWCMA Meeting in 1937<sup>55</sup>

The contention of the Transvaal clothing manufacturers' and garment workers' unions was that wage costs in Cape Town were lower than on the Witwatersrand in the period 1925 to 1939 and that Cape competition was therefore unfair. Both the employers' and the workers' leaders in the Transvaal pleaded with the Wage Board and the Minister of Labour to intervene to equalize wage costs. The Wage Board agreed that the lower wage competition was unfair and made efforts to raise coastal wages until it was stopped by the government in 1935. The refusal of the state to take decisive action in 1930 and in 1935 forced the Transvaal union to undertake its campaigns to organize the Cape garment workers. This Appendix has argued that at times wage costs were lower in the Cape than in the Transvaal but this was not an unchanging state of affairs and did not affect all branches of the clothing industry equally. The Transvaal's higher wage standards were however constantly threatened by the existence of lower wage rates at the coast. If the economic climate deteriorated, the Transvaal would be the first area to be affected.

The Transvaal union and employers were certain about the reason for the lower wages in the Cape. They asserted that "coloured sweated labour"<sup>56</sup> was employed and that wage determinations were constantly flouted. The garment workers were too "poorly organized"<sup>57</sup>

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55. CWCMA Minutes: 23 September 1937 - M2/1.

56. CWCMA Minutes: 30 January 1935 - M2/1.

57. Cape Times 16 December 1929.

to resist the forces which pushed them down to a lower standard of living. The Transvaal union (as well as the SATLC and the Wage Board) realised that the lack of effective clothing worker organization was related to a wider lack of militant worker organization in Cape Town generally.<sup>58</sup>

The Cape union and employers rejected the accusations of unfair competition. The CWCMA raised the issues of railway rates, higher distribution costs, the low wages of African pressers in the Transvaal and the pressure the Cape suffered from overseas competition. The Cape manufacturers never seriously advanced the argument that the "quality of labour"<sup>59</sup> in the Cape was inferior to that in the Transvaal and that lower wages therefore did not indicate lower wage costs. The Transvaal impression that Cape manufacturers relied on coloured sweated labour is false. Cape manufacturers employed an increasing proportion of white workers between 1927 and 1935.<sup>60</sup> At the same time they agreed that coloured and white labour in Cape Town were equally efficient.<sup>61</sup> (The preference for white labour seems to have been related to a wish to be seen to implement the 'civilized labour policy'.<sup>62</sup>)

The leaders of the GWU-CP consistently opposed the efforts of the Wage Board and the Transvaal union to raise wages in Cape Town ostensibly because the effect would be to transfer work from Cape Town to the Witwatersrand and garment workers in Cape Town would become unemployed. B.W. Poole stated at the CFLU conference in 1936 that the latest Transvaal attack on the Cape Union:

...was not made to help the Cape workers but to help themselves. They wanted to kill the trade in Cape Town and take it all to the Reef.<sup>63</sup>

Coloured leaders in Cape Town commonly argued that coloured workers

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58. Some of the reasons for this situation are discussed in Chapter 2, above.

59. CWCMA Minutes: 23 September 1937 - M2/1.

60. See Table 6.3, above.

61. See, for example, CWCMA Minutes: 23 September 1937 - M2/1; Leslie (1930, p.54).

62. See Chapter 4, p.214, above.

63. Cape Times 14 April 1936.

could only retain their employment in competition with whites by accepting lower wages and undercutting them.<sup>64</sup> The CFLU and the GWU-CP leaders applied the same type of argument to the relationship of Cape industry to Transvaal industry. Bill Andrews satirized this doctrine. It amounted to saying:

'Cape Workers! Work for starvation wages and you will have plenty of work and your bosses plenty of profit'.<sup>65</sup>

But this argument was 'common sense' to a wide range of workers.<sup>66</sup> It was the experience of many coloured workers, not only in the clothing industry, that the imposition of higher wages by the Wage Board had led to their replacement by whites.<sup>67</sup> The argument that raising Cape garment workers' wages up to Transvaal levels would displace the Cape industry appeared obvious. As an article in The Sun lamented in 1935,

...we are at present allowing a white Johannesburg industry to persuade them to cut their own throats in the garment trade.<sup>68</sup>

This ideology informed the GWU-CP's efforts to hold back wage advances. The success of these efforts is itself part of the reason for the wage disparity between the Cape and Transvaal.

The 'ideology of undercutting' strengthened the position of those who benefited from Cape 'autonomy' - primarily Bob Stuart and his coterie of union administrators. It is doubtful (although this is a moot point) that it had any positive effect for worker organization, employment or wage standards in Cape Town. The ideology was applied to oppose wage increases from 1925 to the late 1930's. This thesis has indicated that under the impact of the protective tariff and higher, Wage Board-decreed wages, the clothing industry continually rationalized its labour processes, invested in advanced machinery and discovered 'the economy of high wages'. It is likely that if wage increases had been greater,

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64. Marais (1939, p.262); Gool (1945).

65. Forward 20 September 1935.

66. See the debates on coloured workers and trade unionism in The Sun 1935-1936.

67. See The Sun 4 October 1935.

68. The Sun 8 November 1935.

the industry would have been forced to discover at an earlier date the improvements in the organization and mechanization of production it in fact resorted to only later.

#### 4 Discussion

There are strong indications that between the late 1920's and the early 1930's wage costs as well as wage levels were less in Cape Town than in Johannesburg. This attracted the first factories to specialize in shirt manufacture and allowed the Cape to underbid the Transvaal for contracts put up for tender by the government. The Transvaal was only able to compete successfully after the arbitrator reduced wages by ten per cent. If the Transvaal was the victim of 'unfair competition', three questions can be raised for discussion:

- 1) Why was the 'unfair' element in competition not reduced by the migration of Cape garment workers to the Transvaal?
- 2) Why did Transvaal firms not relocate their factories at the coast?
- 3) Why did the Transvaal clothing industry employ mostly expensive white women and not draw on cheap black labour?

In tackling these questions, particularly the last two, it is useful to consider the issue of the wage disparity over a longer period than is covered by the thesis.

##### 4.1 Labour mobility

Some garment workers who were trained in Cape Town did migrate to the Witwatersrand but this was not a major movement. It was not large enough to create a labour shortage in Cape Town and to force Cape wages to rise. The reasons for the lack of labour mobility in the clothing industry between the Witwatersrand and Cape Town are fairly obvious. The distance between the two centres is enormous. Most importantly, women garment workers generally remained tied to their families and husbands. The higher wage such a worker would receive in Johannesburg was not large enough to encourage family migration. The majority of Cape garment workers were coloured and until the late 1930's the Transvaal factories employed only whites and African men pressers (at wages lower than or equal to those paid in Cape Town). The 'racial question'

- which included the difficulty which faced coloured families in finding housing in Johannesburg - was an additional factor which reduced labour mobility.

#### 4.2 Relocation

In the 1950's wage costs in the Transvaal clothing industry rose so far above those in other regions of South Africa that the industry stopped growing and factories relocated their operations to the coastal areas or rural areas that were not subject to wage regulation (Barker, 1962, pp.603, 604). During the years 1925 to 1939, undercutting from the coast was of real significance only periodically. The Wage Board, later assisted by the Transvaal union's organization campaigns, succeeded in raising Cape wages significantly between 1926 and 1928 and again in 1936. After 1932 the Transvaal industry recovered swiftly once wages were cut by 10 per cent by an arbitration board. The disadvantages the Transvaal manufacturers suffered as a result of low wage competition from the coast were never sufficiently long lasting to make the production of clothing in the Transvaal economically unviable. Individual manufacturers certainly went bankrupt under the pressure of Cape competition. But the clothing industry is always highly competitive. Because of its low barriers to entry it has a high rate of enterprise failure. Notwithstanding Cape competition and the vicissitudes of the depression, the Transvaal industry did not collapse. It even grew slightly. Its proximity to the market and its highly suitable labour force were the main supports of this growth. Even if economic forces had jeopardized the existence of the clothing industry in the Transvaal, few firms were large enough to have the resources to relocate as a 'going concern'.

#### 4.3 White labour, black labour

Neither this thesis or appendix is directed at explaining the remarkable features of the clothing industry in the Transvaal - in particular its employment of white labour in low wage jobs (which in South Africa, and specially on the Witwatersrand, have always been the preserve of black workers) and its confinement of black employment in the industry until the late 1930's to the pressing of garments. However, these features of the Transvaal

industry reflect on the unusual growth path of the South African clothing industry. This has implications for our understanding of the Cape clothing industry.

In Britain and the United States the clothing industry grew up in the nineteenth century on the sweatshop and outwork.<sup>69</sup> It made use of successive groups of the most exploitable workers, many of them immigrants, all of them poor and desperate for work. In the absence of laws to control sweating and outwork, competition made them the characteristics of clothing manufacture. The technology of the industry did not give a decisive advantage to factory production. The homemaker, assisted by family labour, could still compete. The clothing industry in South Africa largely escaped this phase of the development of clothing manufacturing. The extreme intensity of labour which allowed such low costs of clothing production in Britain and the United States was made possible by a social structure that was different from that in South Africa. The basic feature of this social structure was the existence of a mass of desperately poor, proletarianized workers.

The existence of a growing competitive capitalism was a precondition for forcing workers to accept the lowest wages. The clothing industry in Britain and the United States developed on the basis of such a competitive capitalism and the cities, the attitudes and the social system it had created. The existence of fully proletarianized workers - such as immigrants - is only one part of the requirements for the development of a low wage industry.<sup>70</sup> The clothing industry in South Africa in the first decades of this century lacked both the labour resources and base of capitalist development. It could not find workers at wages low enough to compete with British imports on any but the smallest scale. As late as 1935, a Cape Town shirt manufacturer told the Customs Tariff Commission that "compared to South Africa, England is a low wage country".

The clothing industry under competitive capitalism is essentially an urban industry. It is attracted to cities and large

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69. See Schmiechen (1974), and Chapter 1, above.

70. See Marx (1974, pp.848-50). Capitalist relations of production produce the lowest wages only if wider social conditions allow this.

towns not only by the market for output but by the particular type of labour available in a city - proletarianized labour. In the Transvaal the attractive cheapness of black labour on the mines was not the product of 'simple' proletarianization - it relied on a complex intermingling of direct and indirect coercion. This extended from the rural areas where the workers had their homes to the mine compound and the rock face. To an extent, low wages were sustained by the access to the land in the rural areas, which workers and their families retained under the migrant labour system. Only an industrial sector like mining, with its monopoly character, centralized labour recruiting system and its ability to use economies of scale, could operate such a system of labour procurement and control.

Neither in the Transvaal, nor in the Cape was there a supply of workers who would accept wages low enough to compete with British industry on any scale on the open market. Where the clothing industry was able to grow - in an isolated and sporadic fashion - it was characterised by sweating and outwork.<sup>71</sup> During World War I the disruption of clothing imports and the need for military uniforms gave the clothing industry in South Africa its first major opportunity. The manufacturers soon learnt to sweat their workers. The appalling conditions in certain Cape Town factories were said to be worse than in Britain. These lower class factories went under in the depression of 1920-1921 and with the revival of intense competition from imports.

The progress of the South African clothing industry after 1925 was in large part due to the imposition of a protective tariff on imports which allowed the clothing factories to pay wages which South African workers would accept. This took place in the context of substantial, gradual improvements which were achieved largely through state intervention to check sweating after 1909. The growth of the South African clothing industry was crucially moulded by the 'civilized labour policy', the Wage Act and the Industrial Conciliation Act. South African clothing workers were badly paid, their conditions of work were unpleasant. They were subjected to long hours of work and strict discipline. But state regulation

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71. This is illustrated for Cape Town in Chapter 1, above.

prevented the all-pervading incidence of sweating and outwork that marked the development of the British and American clothing industries. South African manufacturers were forced to appreciate the advantages of factory production and 'high' wages from the start. They were prevented by law from developing production on the basis of outwork and sweating which would have been profitable only with the use of the lowest paid, 'lowest class' workers. The forces of competition occasionally broke out of the system of control and showed the tendency of the industry to drift towards sweating and intense exploitation. For example the Wage Board in 1935<sup>72</sup> described the "terrible and appalling" conditions in factories "carried on by men of straw" which sprang up in Durban in 1934 after Wage Determination 42 was invalidated by the courts. Wages and prices fell drastically under the extreme competitive conditions and workers "received wages insufficient to provide even the barest necessities of life".<sup>73</sup> The Board commented:

The state of affairs which arose in Durban is completely conclusive of the inability of employees in this trade, under the existing economic system, to protect themselves against sweated labour conditions.

Only by means of wage legislation or strong trade union organization can they avoid the worst of such conditions.<sup>74</sup>

Wages for white workers in the Transvaal were not higher than in the Cape simply because they were based on "European standards" (Barker, 1962, p.393). They were based on the lowest wages that the most suitable workers for factory production would accept. Willingness to accept a low wage is by no means the most important characteristic of an ideal clothing factory worker.<sup>75</sup> If manufacturers had to train labour and provide machinery they needed time to reap the benefits of their investment. A worker had to stay in employment for six months or longer before he or she made a positive contribution to output. For a period, the most suitable clothing workers on the Witwatersrand were white, mainly Afrikaner, women. Legislation and government policy, as well as the strength

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72. Wage Board Report, 12 April 1935, paragraph 19.

73. Ibid., paragraph 20.

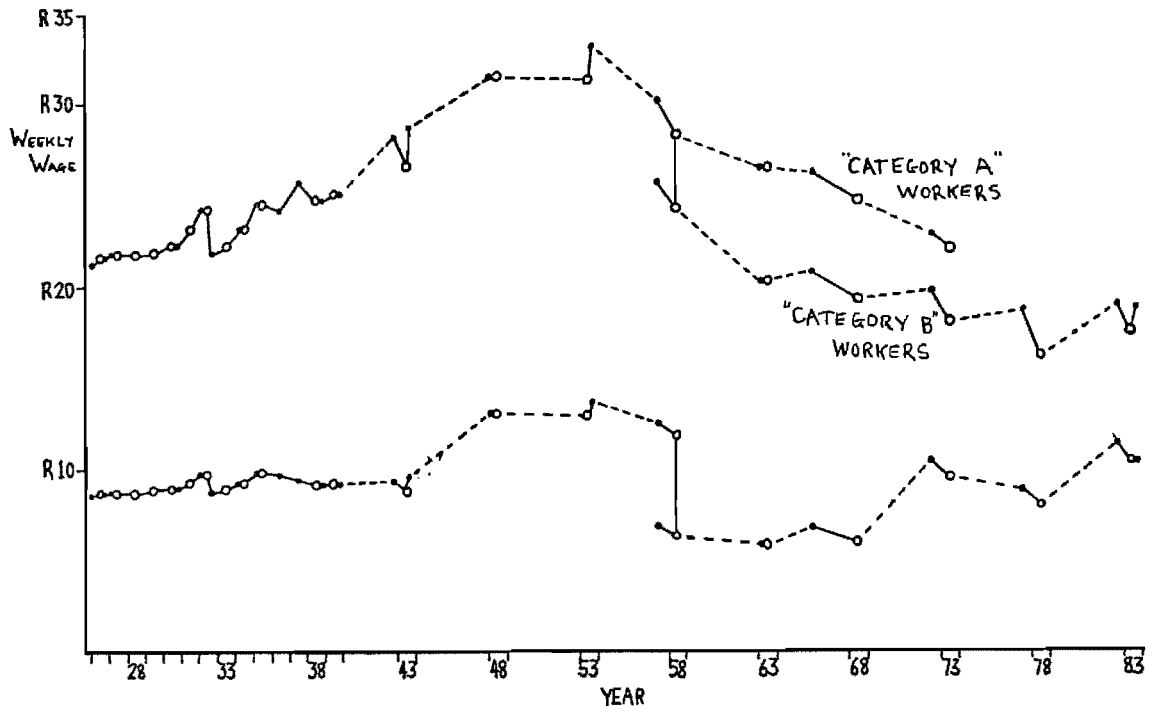
74. Ibid., paragraph 21.

75. As the failure of many "border area" clothing factories testifies.



of their trade union, allowed them to make employment in clothing factories their preserve for about fifteen years.

Graph A.3: The Real Value of the Minimum Starting Wages and Qualified Wages of Female Machinists in the Transvaal Clothing Industry 1925-1983<sup>76</sup> (in 1975 Rands - £1 = R2)



76a. This graph represents changes in the minimum wages of female machinists as reflected in industrial agreements at certain dates. All industrial agreements are included up to 1939. After 1939 the graph gives an indication of the path followed by wage levels by recording the real value of the ruling wages at 5 yearly intervals from 1943 to 1983. Solid dots indicate the real value of wages reflected in an industrial agreement on the date of its application. Hollow dots indicate the deflated value of the wages set in a previous industrial agreement. Solid lines indicate that there are no new wage rates effective between the dates indicated on the horizontal axis. Dotted lines indicate that there are intervening industrial agreements not recorded on the graph.

- b. The average annual retail price index for the Witwatersrand (consumer price index) published in "Union Statistics for Fifty Years" and, from 1960, in the annual or quarterly volumes issued by the Department of Statistics, and rebased, where necessary, to 1975, was used to calculate the real value of wages.
- c. "Category B workers" are those who entered the industry after 1956.

It was on the basis of factory production that the South African clothing industry grew. Real wages rose in all areas between 1925 and 1948<sup>77</sup> on account of labour shortages and especially favourable market conditions (Barker, 1962). But as South Africa's industrial base broadened and as urbanization speeded up, the clothing industry was able to draw on a new range of newly-proletarianized workers. Following the traditions of the clothing industry, it began to use these workers, first coloured, then African women, to depress factory wages. The Transvaal garment workers' union resisted this process by organizing new workers into a separate branch of the union but ensuring that their wage scales were the same as for whites. The upward trend in real wages in the Transvaal ended in 1953. Undermined by competition from declining real wages at the coast and the willingness of African women to accept lower wages, Transvaal wage standards fell drastically. This is illustrated by Graph A.3, above.

In Cape Town, after 1925, white and coloured workers were employed. The industry developed while employing increasingly a "better class of worker". Until the mid-1930's this meant, for many manufacturers, employing more white workers. Under the favourable conditions created by the War, wages in the Cape rose fast, to peak in 1948. From then until 1980 real wages slowly but steadily declined to levels below those set in the first industrial council agreement in 1936. Since the late 1930's the industry has come to employ virtually only coloured labour, and has relied on the growing population in the Western Cape, which is increasingly an urbanized population, to keep wages low as the industry expanded. The Cape overtook the declining Transvaal as the leading area of employment in the clothing industry in the mid-1950's. Today its position is threatened by the growth of the industry in Natal. There, the industry took off in the 1930's on the basis of male Indian labour. Today African and Indian women are the vast majority of workers.

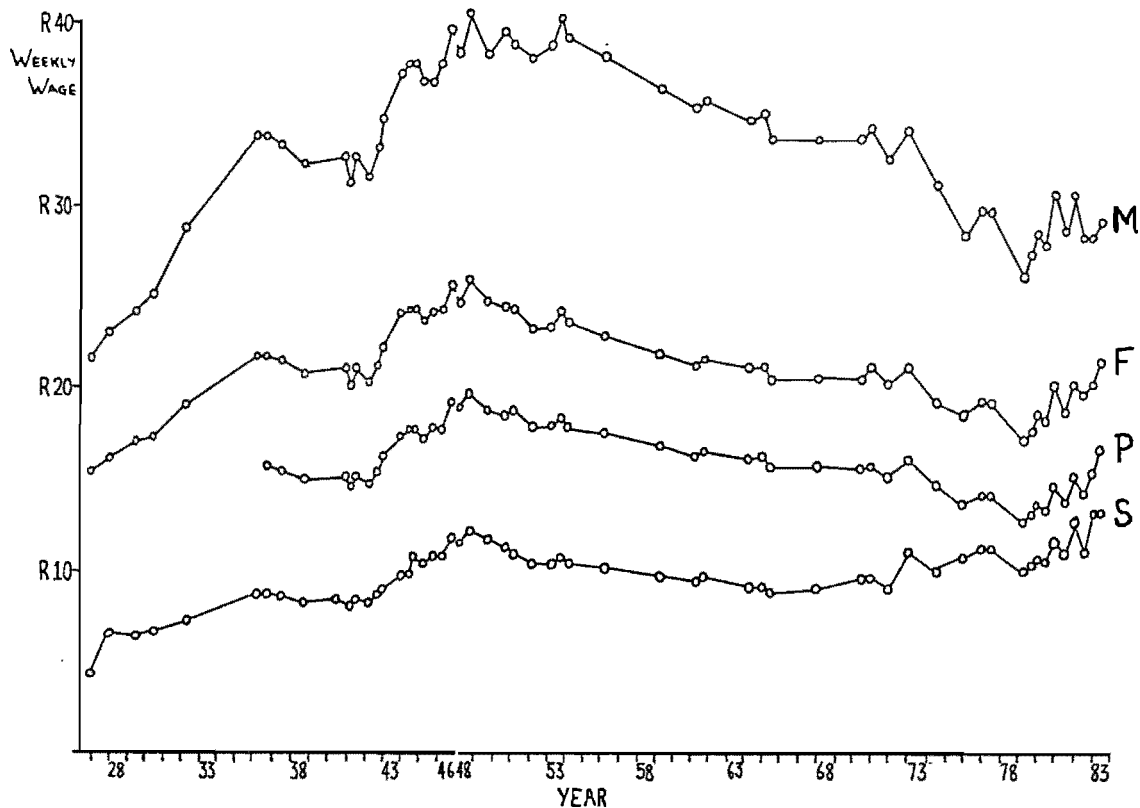
The real value of the wages of Cape garment workers from 1926 to 1983 is illustrated in Graph A.4, below. The minimum wages of qualified workers in three main categories are shown - those of male machinists, female machinists and lower grade female

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77. See Graph A.3, above; Graph A.4, below.

workers (such as packers). All show a similar pattern. The starting wage of learners is the only wage to have risen in real terms since 1948.

Graph A.4: Real Value of Minimum Starting Wages and Qualified Wages of Three Categories of Workers in the Cape Town Clothing Industry, 1926-1983<sup>78</sup> (in 1975 Rands - £1 = R2)



M, F and P correspond to the wages of male machinists, female machinists and female "packers". The starting wage is common to all these categories.

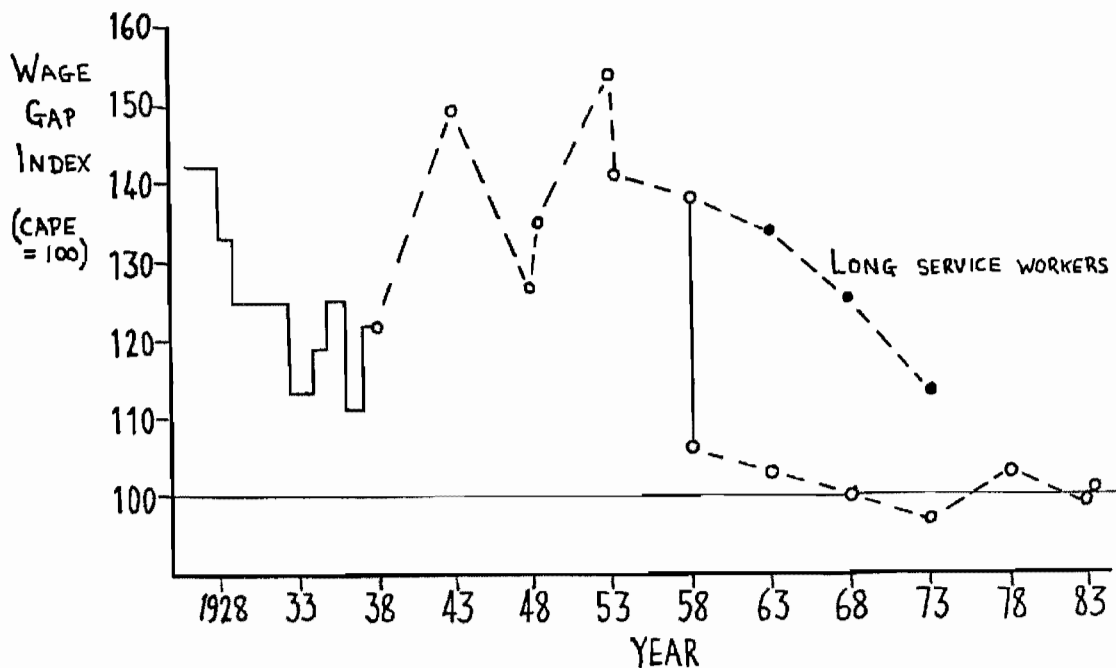
78a. This graph plots the real value of wages ruling just after a change was made in the wage scales. This hides the extent to which inflation (specially since the late 1960's) erodes the value of wages - particularly when changes in the agreements are less frequent.

b. Every change in minimum wage levels under wage determinations, industrial council agreements and War Measure 43 of 1942 (as amended) is indicated. This involved consulting a Great Number of Government Gazettes, the dates of which it would be tedious to record here.

c. The real value of wages was calculated using the retail price index (consumer price index) for Cape Town published in "Union Statistics for 50 Years" and the annual and quarterly volumes issued by the Department of Statistics, suitably rebased to 1975 when necessary.

The fall in wage rates in the Transvaal industry after 1956 was calculated to bring the industry into line with the lower wages paid in the coastal areas. Long service workers continued to be paid wages in excess of coastal wages but the percentage gap between the two slowly narrowed. This is illustrated in Graph A.5 below which indicates the difference between the hourly rates of pay for qualified female machinists in Cape Town and the Transvaal.

Graph A.5: Comparison of Minimum Wages of Qualified Female Machinists between Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, 1926-1983<sup>79</sup>



##### 5 Blame it on the Board

The only academic work to have considered the wage disparities in the clothing industry is that of H.A.F. Barker. Barker's doctoral thesis was published as a book under the sponsorship of the four clothing manufacturers' associations - 'The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry of South Africa, 1907-1957' (Barker, 1962). He also contributed an article on the clothing industry to the

79. The graph is based on a comparison of hourly rates of pay between 1926 and 1939 and then at approximately five year intervals until 1983.

South African Journal of Economics (Barker, 1961). Barker does not consider the reasons for the wage disparity between the Cape Town and Transvaal industries as a distinct problem, nor does he consider the reasons for wage disparities specifically in the period 1925 to 1939. However the general points he raises do reflect on this period.

In essence, Barker attributes the persistence of wage differentials to the "absence of normal mobility of labour" in the clothing industry and the consequent existence of "virtually closed labour markets" in each of the main centres of production (Barker, 1961, p.251). Industrial council agreements reflect "the comparative bargaining powers of the parties involved" in each region (Barker, 1962, p.401). This comparative power varies between regions, resulting in different wages.

Barker is highly critical of this system. The products of the clothing industry have to compete on the same market; manufacturers face the same costs of machinery and raw materials, but wages are set by law at different levels in different centres.

(T)he enforcement of wage-differentials by legal sanctions is tantamount to a form of internal protection which discriminates between domestic producers on the basis of wages.

Thus an economic regionalism is created, which breeds unrest, maladjustments and antagonisms, much as economic nationalism breeds international unrest and antagonisms on a larger scale. (Barker, 1961, p.252)

Barker's outlook is highly coloured by the collapse of the Transvaal clothing industry after 1953 which he experienced personally as the secretary of the CCMA and the TCMA and as the director of the National Clothing Federation of South Africa. This collapse was a direct result of the wage disparity and Barker felt obliged to find a scapegoat. He identifies the culprit as the Wage Board, whose activities in the 1920's and 1930's entrenched the regional differentiation of wages. Barker presents the Transvaal as having always been at a "disadvantage" compared with other centres of clothing production because of its higher wages (1961, p.251).<sup>80</sup>

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80. The fact that "this inequality of wages...does not appear to have resulted in very appreciable disadvantage in wage costs until after the 1939-45 war" (Barker, 1962, p.605) is glossed over at this particular point.

The initial isolation by the Wage Board of the Transvaal clothing industry, merely because it had an industrial council in being, undoubtedly contributed to the propagation of uneconomic wage disparities, which the subsequent formation of more industrial councils in the main coastal centres did nothing to remove. Indeed it is difficult to understand how the multiplication of such independent and virtually competing bodies can be expected to remedy a condition of unequal wage structures, in which the negotiating parties to each council have dissimilar interests. (1962, p.403)

Barker's criticism of the effects of regional industrial councils on the welfare of the clothing industry as a whole is useful and substantiates his plea for the formation of a national industrial council and "a co-ordinated instead of haphazard wage structure" (1962, p.381). But Barker is deluded in seeing the original cause of the wage disparity in the acts and omissions of the Wage Board in the period from 1925 to 1939. This view is presented with some conviction and demands refutation.

Barker argues that the Wage Board entrenched different wage standards between the Transvaal and the coast in its determinations between 1926 and 1932 so that in 1936, when "industrial councils began to function in the coastal centres",

...the industry had already expanded greatly and lower wage structures had become firmly established under the Wage Act in the Western and Eastern Cape and Natal. (1962, p.401)

Barker criticises the Wage Board for not having recommended "a realistic nation-wide wage determination, with suitable differentials based on actual wage costs" (1961, p.252). He suggests that such a determination would have been most easily absorbed before the outbreak of World War II, by which date "the regional disparities in the wages of female machinists (by far the largest category of garment workers) had not assumed unreasonable proportions" (1962, p.128). He argues as follows:

Considering the deterioration of the situation in retrospect, one must incline to the opinion that...the outcome indicates a failure to appreciate the ultimate issues

involved...(W)ith the Wage Board and the Minister as arbiters able to take a detached view, to decide purely on the merits of the case..., and to impose a decision without the necessity of securing full agreement among irreconcilables, it should have been possible for wage conditions to be...imposed gradually on a Union-wide basis..., without the entrenchment of unwarranted or inequitable regional disparities. (1962, p.401)

Barker's arguments against the Wage Board are unjustifiable. The Wage Board was keenly aware of "the ultimate issues involved". Every Wage Board report from 1927 to 1935 argued strongly the need for a nation-wide determination of wages for the clothing industry and a determination which would, moreover, slowly raise the wage standards of the coastal areas until they were as favourable to workers as those on the Witwatersrand. Every Wage Board recommendation from 1926 up to 1935 was consistent with giving effect to this judgement. Barker was familiar with all these reports and recommendations, some of which he quotes. The Wage Board's refusal to be an instrument for encouraging a greater uniformity in wages dates from 1938. By then the Board was a different body in membership and in the function it was required to perform in the economy.<sup>81</sup>

The Minister of Labour refused to gazette the 1935 recommendations of the Wage Board as a determination. There is no indication that he did not "appreciate the ultimate issues involved". He appreciated that a large rise in wages would eat into the profits of Cape clothing manufacturers and retard the expansion of this import-substituting, employment-creating manufacturing industry. He supported first the interests of capital against the demands of labour and only incidentally the interests of the Cape over those of the Transvaal. Barker's view of the state apparatuses as detached arbiters is incorrect. This thesis, by focussing on the role of the Wage Board and the Department of Labour in the Cape clothing industry, illustrates the class nature of the state. But it shows also that no 'correct' way for the state to serve its functions of organizing the dominant classes and disorganizing the dominated classes exists outside of the class struggle.

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81. See Chapter 4, p.220; and Chapter 6, p.306, above.

Appendix B: An Extract from Simons & Simons (1969, pp.449-50)

La Guma and Gomas were then actively engaged in forming trade unions on a joint income of £4.10s. a month. Both assisted a group of garment workers who came out on strike against a wage cut of 10s. on a weekly wage of £3.10s. or less. Bob Stuart, secretary of the local union, declared that the strike was unofficial, whereupon La Guma appealed for financial help to the garment workers' union in Johannesburg. Bach intervened, with the result that the party in Johannesburg instructed La Guma to 'pursue an independent line' and refuse aid from any non-party union. He ignored the directive, and filed a counter-complaint against Bach who, he said, was 'tactless, bureaucratic and disruptive', the 'cause of past friction and potential disruption', and 'a serious menace to party welfare, prestige and progress'. Bach remained, while La Guma, the chief architect of the 'black republic' policy was cast out into the political wilderness.



SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- I     Archival Sources
- II    Official Publications
- III   Interviews
- IV    Newspapers and Periodicals
- V     Books, Articles and Theses

Only material cited in references in the text or in the footnotes is included in the bibliography, with the exception of official statistics. All official statistics consulted are listed. Also I have named all the people who kindly allowed me to interview them. Although few are directly quoted, the interviews were invaluable in developing an understanding of the background to the events described in the thesis and in providing insights into the personalities of the protagonists.

# I ARCHIVAL SOURCES

## 1 Cape Chamber of Industries Archives

The material in this collection is unsorted and unindexed. I have therefore had to develop my own reference system. The CCI was previously called the Cape Province Manufacturers' Association (1914-1922) and before that, the South African Manufacturers' Association (1909-1914).

### C Cape Chamber of Industries

#### C1 Minutes

##### C1/1 (Committee) Minutes

Book 1: 7 November 1904 (inaugural meeting) to 2 July 1908

Book 2: 1 October 1908 to 20 November 1912

Book 3: 11 December 1912 to 28 October 1915

Book 4: 17 January 1916 to 21 August 1918

Book 5: 23 August 1918 to 6 January 1920

##### C1/2 Executive Committee Minutes

Book 1: 28 January 1920 to 28 February 1921

#### C2 Annual Reports

1917 onwards

### M Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association

#### M1 Clothing Section of the CCI (formed 1920)

Minutes: Book 1: 26 April 1920 to 24 August 1925

#### M2 Cape Wholesale Clothing and Shirt Manufacturers' Association (1925-1942 when name is changed to CCMA)

##### M2/1 General Minutes: Book 1: 24 August 1925 to 13 January 1928

Book 2: 2 February 1928 to 1 September 1931

Book 3: 7 September 1931 to 18 June 1934

Book 4: 11 June 1931 to 26 October 1931

and 28 May 1934 to 28 April 1936

Book 5: 26 June 1936 to 10 October 1939

Book 6: 15 November 1939 to 8 February 1945

#### M3 Cape Western Merchant Tailors' Association (formed 1926)

##### M3/1 Minutes: Book 1: 15 March 1936 to 25 January 1929

##### M3/2 Minutes of Conferences between Employers and Employees in the Tailoring Industry: Book 1: 15 June 1926

- M4 Industrial Council for the Garment Manufacturing Industries (1927) Minutes: Book 1: 30 March 1927 and 5 April 1927. (This Council was not registered. The present Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry (Cape) was formed in 1935 and registered in 1936.)

Customs Tariff Commission 1935: Minutes of Evidence (17 Volumes, originally the property of H.J. Laite, a member of the Commission)

## 2 Garment Workers' Union of South Africa (GWUSA) Archives

This collection is housed in the Department of Historical and Literary Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Much of the material cited in the thesis was examined prior to its sorting and indexing. I have therefore been unable to indicate the exact location of many documents by reference to the inventory of the collection compiled by Marcelle Jacobson and Anna M. Cunningham:

Records of the Garment Workers' Union (The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980)

Most of the documents referred to in footnotes as emanating from the GWUSA Archives may be found in the boxes indexed as:

Bbe 1; Bce 1.20.1; Bcc 1; Bcd 1.1; Cba 1.1; Cba 2.4; Cba 2.5;  
Cca 2.5; Dab 1; Dac 2.1; Dac 2.7.1; Dac 2.8.1; Eab 2.

Where documents were consulted after the compilation of the inventory, full details are given.

## 3 Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) Archives

This collection, which includes the archives of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions and the S.A. Trades and Labour Council, is housed in the Department of Historical and Literary Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

Again, most of the material cited in this thesis was examined before the inventory of the collection was published. In the case of the TUCSA collection, however, all the material had been sorted and is more easily locatable than in the case of the GWUSA Archives. The main sections referred to in the thesis are:

A; Cc 1; Da 4.1; Dc 2.12; Dc 7.3; Dc 8.17; Dc 8.26  
 in Anna M. Cunningham Records of the Trade Union Council of South  
 Africa: Part 1 1915-1954 (The Library, University of the Witwaters-  
 rand, 1979)

4 Archives of the Secretary for Labour (S.A.B. ARB)

This collection is part of the holdings of the Central Archives  
 Depot (Sentrale Argief Bewaarplek - S.A.B.) at the Union Buildings,  
 Pretoria. The papers of the Secretary for Labour are identified  
 in the footnotes by the code ARB, followed by the file number.

5 Records of the Cape Supreme Court (C.A.D.)

The Cape Supreme Court records are part of the holdings of the Cape  
 Archives Depot, Victoria Street, Cape Town. The following records  
 are cited in the thesis

Smith v. Crawford and Others Motions 19 (946) 1935

Ex parte Ernest Petersen and Five Others Motions 22 (1083-93) 1935

Garment Workers' Union and Others v. Smith Motions 3 (35) 1936

Smith v. Crawford and Others, N.O. Motions 2 (63) 1936

Rex v. De Freitas, Fortune & Weinberg Criminal Appeals 2 (79) 1936

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## II OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

### 1 Reports of the Wage Board (ordered chronologically by report date)

- 30 September 1926: 'Clothing Industry' Annexure to the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Assembly No.55 of 1927 (hereafter Annexure 55 - 1927), published in The Social and Industrial Review Special Edition 30 September 1926
- 30 November 1926 : 'Interim Report on the Clothing Industry', Annexure 58 - 1927
- 25 September 1927: 'Clothing Manufacturing Industry' Annexure 134 - 1927-8, Social and Industrial Review Special Edition November 1927
- 23 February 1928: 'Clothing Manufacturing Industry' Annexure 398 - 1927-8
- 23 February 1928 : 'Bespoke Tailoring Industry for Certain Areas' Social and Industrial Review Special Edition 22 June 1928
- February 1928 : 'Work of the Board for three years ended February 1928' Annexure 112 - 1929, 2nd Ses.
- 7 March 1928 : 'Bespoke Tailoring Industry' Social and Industrial Review Special Edition 22 June 1928
- 10 October 1928 : 'Bespoke Tailoring Industry' Social and Industrial Review Special Edition 8 December 1928
- 20 July 1931 : 'Clothing Manufacturing Industry' Annexure 56 - 1931-2
- 23 October 1931 : 'Bespoke Tailoring and Clothing Manufacturing Industries' Annexure 82 - 1931-2
- 25 November 1931 : 'Clothing Manufacturing Industry' Annexure 194 - 1931-2
- 31 December 1931 : 'Work of the Board for the period 1 March 1929 to 31 December 1931' Annexure 108 - 1933
- 18 March 1932 : 'Clothing Manufacturing Industry' Annexure 469 - 1931-2
- 12 April 1935 : 'Garment Making Trades' Annexure 99 - 1936
- 21 February 1938 : 'Garment Making Trades' Annexure 190 - 1938

I am indebted to the Library of Parliament for allowing me access to the unpublished reports of the Wage Board which are bound with the Annexures.

### 2 Statistics

#### Industrial Census Reports:

For 1915/16	UG14 - 1918
For 1916/17	UG51 - 1918
For 1917/18	UG17 - 1920

## Industrial Census Reports:

For 1918/19	UG28 - 1921
For 1919/20	UG48 - 1921
For 1920/21	UG40 - 1922
For 1921/22	UG14 - 1924
For 1922/23	UG41 - 1924
For 1924/25	UG41 - 1927
For 1929/30	UG33 - 1931
For 1932/33	UG31 - 1935
For 1935/36	UG24 - 1938
For 1936/37	UG39 - 1939
For 1937/38	UG21 - 1941

Cape of Good Hope : Census 1904

Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of British South  
Africa 1899-1906

Annual Statements of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of  
South Africa 1911-1939

Union of South Africa: Official Year Book

Union Statistics for Fifty Years

South African Statistics 1968, 1982

Monthly Bulletin of Statistics 1940-1946

Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics - First Quarter 1983

### 3 Other Official Publications

Index to the Manuscript Annexures and Printed Papers of the House  
of Assembly 1910-1961 (Printed by Order of Mr. Speaker, 1963)

A6-1906: Report of the Select Committee on the Factory Act.  
Cape of Good Hope. House of Assembly

C1-1906: Report of the Select Committee on the Conducting of  
Factories and the Fair Wage Clause. Cape of Good Hope. Legisla-  
tive Council

S.C.4-1917: Report of the Select Committee on the Regulation of  
Wages (Specified Trades) Bill

UG14-1926: Report of the Economic and Wage Commission

Reports of the Board of Trade and Industries (BTI):

No.28a: 'Shirt, Collar and Pyjama Suit Manufacturing Indus-  
try' Annexure 53 - 1925

No.28b: 'Duty on Shirting' Annexure 537 - 1925

No.107: 'Customs Tariff Amendments' Annexure 427 - 1930

No.303: 'The Clothing Industry' in Commerce & Industry 6  
9 May 1948

Annual Reports of the Department of Labour

For 1933	UG43 - 1934
For 1934	UG11 - 1936
For 1935	UG4 - 1937
For 1936	UG44 - 1937
For 1938	UG51 - 1939

Government Gazettes

## III INTERVIEWS

Mr S Reuben Back 1983 Cape Town	Clothing factory owner/manager since the early 1930's (I.L. Back & Co). Past chairman of the CWCMA and past president of the CCI.
Mr E J Burford 1979 London	Friend of Solly Sachs, former general secretary of NUDW and founder of the NUDW newspaper <u>New Day</u> .
Mr Achmat Davids 1978 Cape Town	Social worker at The Muslim Assembly (Cape), the son of a family of tailors.
Mrs Cynthia Hartwell (nee Judelowitz) 1979 London	Organizer of the Cape Town Branch of the Transvaal garment workers' union, 1945.
Mrs Lily Hertzberg (nee Abrahams) 1979 London	Voluntary worker for the NUDW in Cape Town during and after World War II.
Mr Edgar Jacobs 1978 Cape Town	Founder of Monat & Co (Monatic shirts), 1926 and of Towles-Edgar Jacobs Ltd (Tej), 1946. Key member of the CWCMA, first chairman of ICCI (Cape) in 1935/6.
Mrs Rhoda Kets (nee Strichen) 1981 Cape Town	Garment worker from 1928; activist member of the SAGWU, 1935-6; executive committee member and later paid organizer of GWU-CP. (Interviewed with Kevin Solomons)
Ms Fanny Klenerman 1979 Johannesburg	Proprietor of Vanguard Booksellers.
Mr R Michael Lee 1978 Cape Town	Former Director of the Cape Chamber of Industries (c.1950's and 1960's), former secretary of the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association.
Mr David L Lunn 1978-1980 Cape Town and Johannesburg	Worker at The African Clothing Factory 1929 to 1937; chairman of the GWU-CP, 1936 to 1937; first vice-chairman of ICCI (Cape) in 1935/6; associated with the Lenin Club.
Mrs Pauline Naidu (nee Podbrey) 1979 London	Trade union organizer in Cape Town during World War II and after; secretary of the Cape Millinery Workers' Union and thus a fierce opponent of Robert Stuart.
Mr David Potash 1980 Cape Town	Jeweller, brother of J Potash, a member of the CFLU executive committee in the 1930's.



Mr Fred Richfield 1978 Cape Town	Cape Town trade unionist associated with the CDC of the TLC in the 1930's.
Prof Guy Routh 1979 Brighton	Former secretary of the ICCI (Transvaal).
Mr A Sadulla 1978 Cape Town	Tailor and former member of the Journeymen Tailors' Association, 1926-1928.
Dr Anna Scheepers 1977 Johannesburg	Long-time and current president of the GWUSA (first elected in 1938); participant in campaigns against the leadership of the GWU-CP during World War II and particularly in 1954/55.
Mr Lionel Sussman 1978 Cape Town	Manager at Monat & Co from the early 1930's.
Miss Eileen Ventris 1979 Cape Town	Teacher in Wellington in the 1930's, associated with the Lenin Club.
Mr Herman van Gelderen 1981 Cape Town	Printer since the 1930's, trade unionist, associated with the Lenin Club.

## IV NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

The Bolshevik

The Buyer

The Cape Argus

Cape Federation of Labour Unions: Official Organ

The Cape Times

Commerce & Industry

Forward

Garment Worker/Klerewerker

The Guardian

The Hammer

The Social and Industrial Review

South African Commerce and Manufacturers' Record

This journal changed its name to Industrial South Africa in 1918, to Industrial and Commercial South Africa in 1925, and later to South African Industry and Trade.

The South African Journal of Industries

The South African News

The Sun

Trade Union Bulletin

Trades and Labour Journal of South Africa

Umsebenzi/The South African Worker

Workers' Voice

## V BOOKS, ARTICLES AND THESES

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1961 'The Clothing Industry in S.A.' South African Journal of Economics 29 (4).

1962 The Economics of the Wholesale Clothing Industry of South Africa 1907-1957 Johannesburg: Pallas Publications.

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- 1976 'The Class Character of South Africa's Industrial Legislation' S.A. Labour Bulletin 2 (6)
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